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Making Meaning of Community:
A Multi-Case Study of Three Urban, Middle-School Teachers

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Making Meaning of Community:
A Multi-Case Study of Three Urban, Middle-School Teachers

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Dedication

I present this as an offering to my Lord and Savior as it was his calling and vision that caused me to abandon my own plans and become an educator and scholar. This calling was for students underserved by our nation's educational system—those who are not privileged with an exceptional educational experience. I dedicate this work to them. On my journey to pursue this calling I birthed two incredible daughters. I also dedicate the labor of this dissertation and degree to them, Naomi Grace and Noriah Hope. May you be inspired to expect great things of the Lord, and always pursue relationship with him and participate in his work.

Acknowledgements

As I have ventured to consider how teachers might take up community in ways that support racially, linguistically, and otherwise marginalized students, I must acknowledge the various communities that have encouraged and strengthened me. I acknowledge my faith community. While my fellow followers of Christ may not have fully understood the process and experiences that are involved in obtaining advanced degrees, my church family has prayed for me throughout my journey. In the final stretch I faced an impossible amount of writing and editing to finish the dissertation while nursing and tending to an infant and a group of my brothers and sisters committed to pray daily for three weeks so that the Lord would intervene in a miraculous way. He did.

I also acknowledge my friends and colleagues who *did* understand the intensity and uniqueness of the experience of a doctoral program at a research institution and, thus, were able to offer their companionship and support through the often isolating and sometimes discouraging process. Stories and experiences were compared, numerous group texts and emails were sent, and encouragement and sound advice were shared. While there were many that I will remember fondly, I especially thank Brenda Rubio, Ganiva Reyes, and Blanca Caldas for this.

I acknowledge my family. My mother was a teacher and worked tirelessly to support my, my brothers', and my sister's K-12 education. My father, the first in his family to gain a Bachelor's degree, drove me to my undergraduate institution to submit my application materials and has encouraged me to continue in education. Both have not ceased praying for me, loving me, and working to encourage and support me however they found opportunity. My younger sister and brothers, Abigayle, Phillip, and Luke,

have, at times, thought me to be nuts to willingly inflict seemingly endless study upon myself, but they too have prayed for me and loved me, and I hope that I have inspired, encouraged, and loved them back well. Beyond my immediate family, my aunt has othermothered my eldest daughter for well over two years now. I am so profoundly grateful for the unbounded love and care she has poured into Naomi's life.

My husband, Randal, had no idea what we were getting into as I began my Master's program shortly after we were married. This was probably because I had no idea. Neither of us had family or friends that had been on such a journey before us to let us know of the intensity and rigor that lay before us. There was, perhaps, some blessing in this. Having endured the lows and enjoying the highs with me, I am so incredibly and profoundly grateful to have such an incredible partner. He never questioned my pursuit or undermined it. Rather he participated with me in whatever had to be done to support my completion of the degrees. He set aside his own education and career to care for our daughters and support our family. Thank you, Randal. I pray that our love and relationship continues to flourish by the Lord's protection and provision, for his glory.

Much is left necessarily off in this acknowledgement, but I am sorry if anyone feels overlooked or underappreciated. There have been so many important relationships in my life. Over all relationships, however, has been the one I hold with my creator and heavenly father, God, ever-present guide, Holy Spirit, and redeemer, Jesus Christ. I can proclaim that the joy of the Lord has been my strength (Nehemiah 8:10) and that I have strived, despite many failings, to do all in the name of the Lord (Colossians 3:17).

Making Meaning of Community:
A Multi-Case Study of Three Urban, Middle-School Teachers

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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In response to a widespread use of the term, "community," within the field of education, and foundational use of the notion within critical, anti-deficit approaches to pedagogy, this study takes up considerations of meanings and uses of community within middle school classrooms. The following questions guide this study: 1. How do successful, urban, middle-school teachers working with students of color understand the concept of "community" in relation to their work with these students? and 2. How do these teachers approach and draw from their conceptions of "community" in their classroom practices? Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Critical Human Geography theories are brought together to form the conceptual framework. In order to investigate these questions, a qualitative multi-case study design is used and data included interviews, observations, artifacts, photography, and mapping. Three teachers, within the subject areas of math, Spanish, and science, participated in this study. Findings revealed complex, contradictory, shifting, and dynamic ways community was conceptualized and used. Rather than being simply a positive, desirable or a negative, problematic concept, community was described in ways that positioned it as both positive and negative. The teachers' identity, particularly around language, and their intentional actions affected their ability to be part of their students' communities. This membership status in turn

affected the classroom environment and functioning. This holds implications for teacher education and development as well as school leadership and future research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> *Altogether too frequently, teacher candidates practice a form of "guerilla teaching"- going into unfamiliar schools, briefly depositing limited content to children whom they have never met, and testing theory in the absence of even a basic understanding of the community in which the school is situated*. (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, Malaby, and Clausen, 2010, p. 54)

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "community," taken up with this work, has been very present throughout my graduate studies—although it took me several semesters to realize it. Familiarity and commonplaceness lend a kind of invisibility to ideas so that they are easily taken for granted and overlooked. This was my experience with "community." One day, as I re-read Gloria Ladson-Billings' work, the term seemed to pop out at me. From that moment I began slowly contemplating this term as it continued to make itself evident over and over again in a great many other socioculturally-based education pieces with which I was familiar with but had not considered with this new lens before. It seemed that the more I explored the idea of "community" the more it grew and the more ambiguous and daunting it became—much like the mythical Hydra. The challenge called to me though, and I was compelled to give my attention to this concept that has been enduring and frequently used within many contexts. I became very interested in "community" as a potentially powerful concept and tool for teaching—both in terms of student engagement and empowerment. At the same time I recognized that "guerilla

teaching" (as cited above) and teachers' lack of connection with a school's "community" is a concern. In response I began to wonder how this reality might be different for "successful" teachers. How are these teachers thinking about "community?" And how are they using these understandings in the classroom within their teaching practices?

"Community" is a concept that is frequently emphasized as having utility in education, having both a historical precedence as well as an ability to span disciplines and niches within education. Revealing the enduring nature of the term, John Dewey, is often remembered as bringing "community" into educational discussions during the early part of the twentieth century (Camicia and Franklin, 2010; Warren, 2005) as he pushed for a child's experiences and life outside of the school to be brought into the classroom. Twenty years ago Ladson-Billings (1995b) placed a similar focus on "community" saying, "For more than a decade, anthropologists have examined ways that teaching can better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools" (p. 466).

Today, the continued significance assigned to the term "community" is evident through the expansive use of the term in educationally-focused literature. An Amazon.com search of "education and community" within the "books" category yields over 75,000 results. Within the field of education, journals, college courses, conferences, and even textbooks have centered on the notion of "community." *The School Community Journal*, for instance, published its first issue in 1991 and celebrated its ten-year commemoration with a special issue in 2001. Furthermore, a college textbook for future teachers and administrators called *School, Family, and Community Partnerships:*

Preparing Educators and Improving Schools, reprinted its second edition (Westview Press, 2011). Speaking of teacher education, Cruz and Giles (2000), stated that, "Research related to the community represents a relatively new direction in service-learning research" (p. 28). Fendler (2006) summed up the broad curricular and pedagogical attention saying, "Community building is all the rage" (p. 303).

In addition to holding importance across time, "community" has also been a term picked up across various domains within education. Sociologists and researchers focused on social-work have taken up some specific projects that give marked attention to the "community". Warren (2005) connected community revitalization to urban school reform. Calling for school-community collaboration, he claimed it could:

- Improve the social context of education so that children come to school better able to learn
- Foster parental and community participation in the education of children and the work of schools
- Work to transform the culture of schools and the practice of schooling and hold school officials accountable for educational gains
- Help build a political constituency for public education to support the delivery of greater resources to schools and to address in other ways the profound inequalities in public education (pp. 135-136)

Joyce Epstein's work has focused on the interlinking between the home, school, family, and community (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Rolf Loeber and others (Catalano, Loeber, & McKinney, 1999; Loeber & Farrington, 1999) have also linked

schooling and "community" together by suggesting that the concept can be used to address in-school, juvenile violence and offending.

More closely matched to my study, however, is how the concept has surfaced within the past couple of decades in prominent works that focus on how culture and other societal constructs impact education. Ethnographers and anthropologists (e.g. Foley, 1990; Ogbu (2004)) have looked to the family, neighborhood, people, and institutions involved in students' lives (i.e. students' "communities") to help better understand and form a broader conceptualization of education. Still others (e.g. Gay, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992) have brought the concept of "community" more directly into curricular and pedagogical discussions. Rationale for this has centered on issues of cultural-mismatch and deficit-oriented thinking: predominantly white, middle-class, female teachers (National Center for Education Information, 2011) struggle to serve urban, lower-income, students of color—students with whom they often don't directly identify or relate (Au and Kawakami, 1994; Delpit, 2006; Irvine, 2003). Despite the potential for "community" to bridge this gap and support students' education, some have suggested that the concept is understood and used in problematic ways.

COMMUNITY AS PROBLEMATIC

In addition to widespread use of the term "community," researchers have also problematized its use and enactment in education settings. Scholars have identified three

problems that point to how the term is (1) *ill-defined* (Camicia & Franklin, 2010; Fendler, 2006), (2) *deficit-oriented and harmful* (Groulx, 2001; Hyland, 2009; Philip, Way, Garcia, Schuler-Brown, & Navarro, 2013), and (3) *alienating and exclusive* (Camicia & Franklin, 2010; Fendler, 2006).

Ill-Defined Use of the Term "Community"

One of the difficulties with centering "community" in research is that the expansive and varied use of the term has led to a complex, messy, and shifting concept. Connie North (2008) observed a similar difficulty with the use of the term "social justice education" arguing that it is "a dynamic concept that has been associated with different beliefs, practices, and policies across time" (p. 1183). She likened the use of "social justice education" to that of the term "multiculturalism," which has also received much attention as its meaning has been contested and fought over for decades.

Researchers have applied similar claims to the use of the term "community." Cruz and Giles (2000) said, "This question by what we mean by 'community' continues to baffle scholars across fields of study" (p. 29) while Camicia and Franklin (2010)—in considering curriculum reform—stated, "There is something nebulous in the discourse of community that leads those who employ it to talk about the concept in vague and often times contradictory ways" (p. 95). Others have added that, "'Community' is a term that is much used and little defined" (Redding, 2001, p. 1), and that, "Terms like community tend to be used so loosely that their meanings become vague and muddy" (Fendler, 2006, p. 303). All of this reveals the need for continued questioning and investigation of the

term's meanings; muddiness renders understanding and use of the notion ineffectual at best, or harmful at worst—as the next two allegations bring up.

Teachers' Deficit-Based Usages

A main point of contention around teachers' use of "community" has been the ways it is conceptualized. Scholars have presented some strong examples of how teachers have either not been able to connect with their students' communities and how attempts to engage with the notion have been harmful. They have argued teachers' difficulties with "community" stem from: *deficit views and beliefs about students* (Groulx, 2001; Hyland, 2009; Philip et al., 2013), *racist thinking and beliefs* (Gay, 2010; Groulx, 2001; Hyland, 2005), *naïve and stereotypical understandings* (Sleeter, 2001), *and fear—perception that these communities are dangerous* (Gilbert, 1997).

These scholars have pointed to the harmful effects these beliefs can have on students within the classroom. Philip et al. (2013) poignantly noted: "The manner in which…'community' as a set of presumed needs prescribed paternalistic solutions to an abstract aggregation of people, highlight the problematic consequences…" (p. 182). This concern of teachers misappropriating their students' community should not be taken lightly. However, will oppressive and dehumanizing thinking, as described by Philip et al., always be the result of teachers' attempts to bring "community" into their practices? This problem of teacher's deficit-based, harmful conceptualizations of "community," then, presents opportunity for further research.

Teachers' Alienating and Exclusionary Usages

Researchers have also noted a third problem with the enactment of "community" in schools and classrooms: it can be exclusionary. Camicia and Franklin (2010) and Fendler (2006) argued that "community" can be used to maintain power relations rather than critique them. In line with this, Fendler (2006) described employment of "community" in the classroom as alienating students of color. Both Fendler (2006) and Philip et al. (2013) argued that this was a result from dismissing or attempting to assimilate difference.

The existing literature illuminates how some conceptions (e.g. deficit-based) of community—developed within the classroom space—may pose a risk to students of color. These risks center on the idea that "urban" students and their communities may be seen as deficient or that the differences possessed by students of color will be erased. What is not addressed by this body of work is how "community" exists in "successful," urban teachers' understandings and in their classrooms with students of color. Research has shown that teachers can experience "success" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009) in urban classrooms of color. How, then, do these "successful" teachers understand and use the construct of "community" in their daily pedagogic practices?

"SUCCESSFUL" K-12 TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF "COMMUNITY"

The extant literature reveals how some "successful," Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) teachers have understood community. Within this conceptual and empirical work, "community" is central in some works and simply identified as a space of support

in others. In this work, teachers conceptualized "community" as: (1) *existing outside of the classroom—the people, geography, and organizations surrounding the school* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008; Oliver, 1996, Ukpokodu, 2012) *and the students' "worlds"* (Milner, 2008, p. 1582; Oliver, 1996); (2) *groups defined by cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender statuses* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008); (3) *holding value and use for education* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011); and (4) *signifying a relationship—whether it be unifying and empowering through identity* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008) *or supporting an environment of collaboration and care* (Boutte & Hill, 2006).

While this literature reveals how community has been understood in some unique and also common ways, research that specifically seeks to interrogate teachers' understandings is lacking. Additionally, there is a scarcity of work that uses a critical theoretical foundation to consider community within K-12 teachers' understandings; beyond just "successful" teachers, how are culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009) and other critically-oriented teachers conceptualizing "community?" For example, though Boutte and Hill (2006), Irizarry and Raible (2011), and Milner (2008) do take up a critical lens and present some anti-deficit understandings teachers have held, more work is needed to consider "community" in less singular ways as it is often represented as simply the social relationships, culture, or geographic places directly connected to students. For instance, if and how do teachers understand "community" as constitutive of varying contexts? Such as how and when do they think about community as existing on a micro (e.g. local) and/or a macro (e.g. national) scale? Or think about community in the

context of themselves or their students? Or operating within and/or beyond the classroom and school? Also, do teachers hold a single definition for "community" or many—possibly contradictory—definitions? And, do they always conceptualize "community" in anti-deficit ways? Further what implications do these viewpoints hold on teachers' approach to their instructional practices? Research that engages in more explicit questioning may reveal current assumptions and expand some fixed ways the concept seems to be presented.

Literature has revealed some significant ways that teachers are understanding the notion of "community" and has found "community" useful as a tool to develop "better" or more culturally relevant pedagogy. While this extremely valuable work, I believe consideration of connections between teachers' understandings and their practices is also important, yet is often under-considered. De Barling (2001) and Gay (2010) have asserted that teachers' beliefs affect their teaching, yet this has not been forefronted in literature that examines how "successful" teachers think about "community." Research that strives to reveal this relationship would extend current work. The inverse of this relationship could also be considered: how might the act of utilizing "community" (however it is conceptualized) within teaching practice work to further inform, alter, and develop teachers' understandings of it?

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

Based on the importance scholars have assigned to the concept of "community" and the need to consider the counterarguments of how "community" is problematic, I studied teachers' understandings of "community" and how these understandings connect with their use of "community" in their teaching practices. More specifically, I built from existing scholarship with my consideration of how "successful," teachers, working in an urban school with students of color, understand and use the notion of "community." In focusing on "successful," urban teachers this study draws from a critical theoretical perspective and approaches teachers' understandings and use of "community" in a way that allows for complexity—understandings that are multiple, fluid, and shifting. In addition to looking at how teachers understand community, I also sought to contribute to the existing literature by purposefully examining the connections between what these successful teachers' understanding about "community" and how these understandings inform their classroom pedagogy.

Through this qualitative, case study I investigated "successful," urban, middle-school teachers' understandings of "community" and their students' communities, and the connections between these understandings and their teaching practices. The following questions guided my inquiry:

1. How do successful, urban, middle-school teachers working with students of color understand the concept of "community" in relation to their work with these students?

a. How do these teachers understand the communities in which their students participate and are a part?

b. How do these teachers understand themselves in relation to their students' communities?

2. How do these teachers approach and draw from their conceptions of "community" in their classroom practices?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

This study draws from two theoretical frameworks: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and Critical Human Geography (CHG). While scholars in the field of education have utilized both frameworks, CRP began in education and CHG comes from outside the field. CHG has been used to talk about such issues in education as, "urban," (Buendia, 2011; Morgan, 2012), globalization (Buenfil-Burgos, 2009; Lipman, 2005; McConaghy, 2006b; Sprecher, 2013), learning environment (Steward, 2008), and student identity (Zacher, 2006). Still others have used CHG in their more direct addressing of the topic of teaching (Burns, 2009; Duhn, 2012; Ellis, 2004; Schmidt, 2011).

I believe CRP and CHG are compatible because of they share a critical foundation. Each holds an ontological and epistemological stance that recognizes social relations as operating within the context of power so that relationships are situated in a center and periphery dynamic. This tension and dialectic relationship creates and shapes us: from our very existence to our ways of knowing and understanding. This shared characteristic links CRP and CHG and opens the possibility to use them together in constructive and mutually supportive ways. In this study, it is vital to approach teachers'

understandings and actions (i.e. teaching) as imbued with power and located within systems of power.

While I contend that both CRP and CHG can be used simultaneously due to their critical foundations, they each speak to key concerns in this study. Below I briefly describe each framework and discuss how these align with my research.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995b) presented what she described as a "microanalytic and macroanalytic" (p. 465) perspective of culture and teaching in order to present a culturally relevant theory of education. From a critical paradigm, CRP gives particular attention to race and culture, understanding these as having both macro (i.e. a system and societal level) and micro level (i.e., individual and local) effects on teachers, students and communities of color. Moreover, CRP is specifically focused on "good teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 159) or pedagogy used within the context of classrooms that serve students of color who have not experienced "success" in school (as defined by widely-accepted standardized assessments and dominant sociocultural norms). In her discussions, Ladson-Billings further delineated CRP as fostering a dynamic, non-deficit relationship between "home/community culture and school culture" (p. 467). Speaking to the context of my study, Ladson-Billings (1995b) wrote, "For scholars interested in the success of students of color in complex, urban environments, this work provides some important theoretical and conceptual groundwork" (p. 468).

Postmodern Critical Human Geography

CHG is centered in a critical paradigm but also draws from a postmodern paradigm. This framework takes up issues of power by using it to contextualize the shifting, fluid, dynamic, and hypercomplex nature of geography and space. Lefebvre (2000) described this as space being produced and reproduced out of itself. Space through a CHG perspective becomes destabilized, existing in constructed and contextualized ways. Space also holds a scalar characteristic—a continuum of micro to macro spaces. In addition to these characteristics that served to deepen my research, CHG offers a broad, widely applicable framework that assisted in my examination of how the teachers in my study understood and used the notion of "community." Because CHG has been taken up by many scholars (including Lefebvre, Soja, and de Certeau to name a few), I bring these discussions together to create a working understanding of CHG based on what I believe are six main commitments it holds to. I present this in detail in the next chapter.

Through a Conceptual Lens of CRP and CHG

The shared critical paradigm of CRP and CHG supports the ability for both to support and complement each other. It is their distinctiveness, though, that fosters their real collaborative strength. Since this study is focused on "successful" teachers' understandings and teaching practices it is useful to draw on CRP to consider how these teachers may align with Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b, 2009) presentations of "good," "successful," and "culturally relevant" teachers. However, as "community" is not the primary focus of CRP, CHG assists in grappling with the hypercomplexity of the concept, "community." As described, CHG's postmodern take on geography and space

allows for the shifting, dynamic, and even conflictual ways "community" exists in literature and potentially within this study. Another benefit of the pairing is that CRP's attention to race, informs my focus on "urban" teachers' understandings, while CHG works to expand and spatially contextualize this focus, so that "community" does not become fetishized (Lefebvre, 2000), focused on solely as a micro-level space and devoid of interactions with other spaces that construct and produce it. In all, I have deliberately chosen these two distinctive frameworks so that they would challenge my work to look more deeply at teachers' understandings and practices.

KEY TERMS

There are some key terms that arise from this work and these research questions. These include: community; successful; urban; teacher understanding(s); non- and anti-deficit; middle school; students of color; and classroom. In order to clarify the research questions already presented and the understanding that exist going into this study, I now present a foundational and/or working definition and meaning for each of these terms.

Community

In working to define what I have already described as a complex, fluid, widely-defined term, I consider Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995b, 2009) use of "community." Though she does not explicitly define the term, there are two main ways that I have interpreted it within her writings on CRP. First she aligned "community" with students' homes, arguing the need for teachers to make strong connections with students' home

lives. This use suggests she recognized the notion as holding social, relational, and geographic meanings. A second way Ladson-Billings (1995b) used "community" was to designate a particular group of people, such as, "Native Hawaiians or Native Americans" (p. 468). Used in this way, it holds meanings of race and ethnicity across varied temporal and spatial contexts. This definition is also in line with main definitions I found from a review of 132 peer-reviewed journal articles that held some connection with CRP.

Considered in this way, I initially define community as: *students' families and their cultural and racial characteristics; the local, geographic areas around where they live* (or around the school, as the school is a central concern within this literature); *and the religious institutions, businesses* (particularly those with local ties), *or other organizations that are in close geographic proximity to the students' homes and/or schools.*

Although I have presented this working definition for community, I acknowledge the contribution that CHG can offer in expanding this thinking. Taking into account the main commitments of the framework, "community" can be understood as dynamic, meaning that the notion is shifting, fluid, can change meanings, have multiple meanings, or even have conflicting meanings simultaneously. The reason for this fluidity is that the term is contextual and constructed. With this in mind I recognize the limitations of defining community as done here and worked to keep the influence of CHG present as I explored the term. Additionally, as CHG challenges and destabilizes every use of the term, I have worked to provide continued clarification when needed with regard to uses and meanings of the term "community."

Success

"Success" is a value-laden term and one that is interpreted in differing ways. I have chosen this term, however, because it is the term Ladson-Billing's (1995b, 2009) uses as a descriptor for the teachers she studied and it offers a way to build on and speak to existing literature. "Success," as described by Ladson-Billings, holds both macro and micro level meanings. Seeking to integrate principals' and parents' notions of "success," she requested nominations from both groups. She presented how parents and principals conceptualized success saying, "The parents' criteria for teaching excellence included being accorded respect by the teacher, student enthusiasm toward school and academic tasks, and student attitudes toward themselves and others" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 471) and that, "Principals' criteria for teaching excellence included excellent classroom management skills, student achievement (as measured by standardized test scores), and personal observations of teaching practice" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 472).

Following Ladson-Billings' lead, I also define "success" in terms of both micro and macro levels. This will be developed through middle-school students' and principals' conceptualizations of success. From students I gathered nominations for teachers who "succeeded" at an individual levels with students. Principals offered a way to consider "success" on a larger scale through standardized test scores and beyond. I present more detail on this in chapter three.

Urban

The term "urban" can also hold multiple meanings. The simple Merriam-Webster definition for "urban" is, "of, relating to, characteristic of, or constituting a city." From a geographic perspective, an "urban" school can be interpreted simply as meaning that the school is located within a city. However, viewed from a critical theoretical positioning as CRP and CHG demand, meanings of urban are understood as instilled with power. An example of this is when "urban" serves as coded language signifying socially-constructed statuses, particularly around race and class (Watson, 2011). Recognizing these differing definitions and not wanting to dismiss either, I combine them. I recognize "urban" as potentially coded language to describe a place, person, or organization rooted within a city that has been considered by others in racialized and classed ways.

Although problematic, I still find "urban" a useful descriptor since it is a common term and used within literature presented in this chapter. I do not seek to simply use "urban" as a proxy term or coded language, though. The middle school in this study could be considered urban due to both geographic and social-status reasoning. Though the city in this study does not boast the dismal inner-city conditions that some "urban" cities (such as portrayed in Anyon's (1994) and Kozol's (1991) work) face, the area of focus for this study is centrally located within a medium-sized (bordering on large-sized) city. Additionally, since race and class are often aligned with the term, the school within this study can be considered urban with a student population made up primarily of students of color who receive free or reduced lunch (school demographics will be discussed more in chapter three).

In addition to meeting geographic and status qualifications, residents living around the school in my study have also confirmed this label—referring to the geographic area as "urban." Finally, "urban" is a term often used in some of the main literature I consider in this study. "Urban," then, holds importance to my work by connecting it with other's work and acknowledging current, local discourse. For all of these reasons, I chose to label the teachers in this study "urban."

Understanding

While there are several words to choose from to describe my research focus (e.g. perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, conceptions, ways of knowing or knowledge), I have chosen to use "understanding" (or perhaps more precisely "understandings") to describe how teachers think about and conceptualize community. This term, I feel, conveys a two-fold meaning: a constructivist taking in or processing of the world as well as formation of conceptions and beliefs. This flexibility matches my approach to this study—that teachers' understandings are formed or constructed.

In line with a definition that points to a constructed nature, I also use the term "understanding(s)" to signify the characteristics of multiplicity and fluidity across time and space. Critical Human Geography theorist Henry Lefebvre (2000) asserted the postmodern commitment that there is not one, fixed meaning for terms; rather, he deconstructed and questioned terminology. For this reason I purposefully use the plural form of the word: "understandings." Applying this to the concept of teacher understandings, the term should reflect a constructed, shifting, and plural nature that describes their internal processing and held beliefs.

Non- and Anti-Deficit

While not found within the research questions, "non-deficit" and "anti-deficit" are crucial concepts in critical approaches to education that have sought to expose and counter deficit thinking about students, their parents, their culture, and so on. For this reason, I use the terminology within my review of literature. Non-deficit refers to considerations of people or things (e.g. culture, skills, or knowledge) that do not view them in negative ways or as being deficient or lacking in something, but rather views people or things as having assets or holding value. Anti-deficit, similarly, also takes this approach, but, based in critical perspective and according to Valencia and Perl (1997), asserts itself in a more active and deliberate way. That is, anti-deficit thinking not only seeks to avoid viewing people and things as deficient, but also actively works again deficit thinking to contest and dismantle it, pointing out systemic inequity and power issues. While a nuanced difference, I believe it is one worth bringing attention to. I will discuss these terms in greater depth in chapter two.

Other Framing Terms

The terms "middle school," "students of color," and "classroom" present less difficulty in defining, but they too should be clarified within the context of this study. By middle school, I refer to grades sixth through eighth.

Students of color should be understood as those who identify or are identified as non-White; this may extend beyond simply skin pigmentation to such defining qualities as language, culture, and ethnicity. Within the context of school demographic data, then,

"students of color" include "Hispanic" (i.e. Latin@) students even though this group is often considered racially White within mainstream discourse.

Finally, use of the term "classroom" refers to the physical space within the school building where the teacher holds his or her class. While recognizing that a postmodern paradigm challenges this construction of "classroom," the traditional, fixed sense of the word is the intended meaning within this work.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this first chapter I have sought to introduce the importance of the term and concept, "community" and an overview of how it has been used and discussed within education. I also presented the theoretical frameworks and terms that support my study.

In the following chapter I present my theoretical framework and the literature germane to my research questions. I describe the founding commitments of CHG and how it has been taken up within the field of education. I then provide some discussion around CRP and its main tenants. Finally, I turn to key literature that further contextualizes this study. In this section I address how "community" has been problematized and how it has been taken up in work that examines teachers' understandings and teaching practices.

In the third chapter I describe my research design. This includes presenting my chosen methodology and methods that will be used for this study. Within my discussion

of methods, I provide details about the research site, participants, data-collection methods, approach to data analysis, and trustworthiness of this endeavor.

Chapter four through seven present the data of this study. The fourth chapter begins this by contextualizes the proceeding three chapters with a "placing" of HMS and an introduction of the teachers. Chapters five through seven are dedicated to each of the teachers of this study: Ms. Corazón, Mrs. García, and Mrs. Taylor.

Finally, chapter eight summarizes the study. In this chapter I briefly review the findings and consider the cases collectively. I then connect this back to the extant literature and offer implications.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In this chapter I expand on the main foundations of my research that were highlighted in the previous chapter. The two main foci of this chapter are: literature germane to my study and the conceptual framing of my work. Prior to presenting literature that is more specifically connected to my research questions, I begin by addressing an important, overarching concept within the literature—deficit thinking. From there I review what scholars has said about "community" and teachers' understandings and practices. Finally, I turn to two theoretical frameworks—CRP and CHG. In this second section I describe each framework and then how I am bringing them together to undergird my work. These framing discussions serve as the groundwork, context, and were the rationale for this study.

LITERATURE GERMANE FOR THIS STUDY

In this section I present literature that contextualizes my three main research questions:

> *1. How do successful, urban, middle-school teachers working with students of color understand the concept of "community" in relation to their work with these students?*

a. *How do these teachers understand the communities in which their students participate and are a part?*
b. *How do these teachers understand themselves in relation to their students' communities?*

2. *How do these teachers approach and draw from their conceptions of "community" in their classroom practices?*

I begin by laying out a key element—deficit and anti-deficit thinking. This concept helps to identify a dominant way that the notion of "community" has existed in literature. After presenting deficit and anti-deficit thinking, I look at how deficit thinking has come up in substantial critiques of teachers' thinking and use of "community." After describing how scholars have problematized "community," I describe specific approaches to teaching that offer a response to these concerns through taking a critical, anti-deficit stance. In considering this literature, I first present empirical and conceptual work that highlights some ways in which "community" has been understood by teachers. After this I illustrate how the concept of "community" is a crucial piece of well-recognized, critical, anti-deficit approaches to teaching.

Deficit and Anti-Deficit Thinking

Historically, two main ideological approaches to students and their "communities" can be seen. These are "deficit thinking" (Valencia, 1997, 2010) and "anti-deficit thinking" (Valencia, 2010; Valencia and Perl, 1997). In what follows, I will describe these belief systems and present how they are important for within education.

Deficit thinking. Deficit thinking (similar to "subtractive" thinking that Valenzuela (1999) described), views students and their families as innately socially, culturally, and intellectually lacking in their skills, abilities, and characteristics. It is this view—assigning blame to the individual (Valencia, 2010)—that is used to explain a lack of "success" (e.g. academic achievement and graduation) among students of color. Deficit views of children and their families have been present for quite some time, however, the ideological stance really grew within the field of education during the 1930s through the popularity of eugenics (Selden, 2000). (As a term, though, Valencia (2010) described how "deficit thinking" was not developed until the 1960s.)

More recently this deficit thinking can be seen in differing ways. Culture has centered in deficit discourse around parents lack of conformation to the dominant, mainstream expectations held by schools and staff (Lareau, 2000). This follows in the same vein as the "inadequate" parents, home, and child thinking of the 1960s discourse (Valencia and Solórzano, 1997). In addition to this, Ruby Payne's presentation of the "culture of poverty" drew on Oscar Lewis' theory presented in 1965 around poverty (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008). Payne's take serves as yet another example of deficit thinking and current, culturally-based forms.

Currently there are several structures that support deficit thinking within education. One issue is the fact that the overall average years of teaching experience among teachers is in decline with 26 percent of teachers possessing only five years of teaching experience or less (National Center for Education Information, 2011). This means that teachers, many of whom are relatively new to the profession, are likely to find

comfort in “method fetishes” and “one-size-fits-all" approaches to teaching (Bartolomé, 1994), such as Ruby Payne offers. Beyond “quick-fix” appeal of deficit approaches, there is also a lack of understanding of the “other” (Gay, 2010; Gilbert, 1997). Given that over 80 percent of teachers are female and over 80 percent are White (National Center for Education Information, 2011), student blame is exacerbated by racial, cultural, economic, and social mismatches between teachers and their students (Au and Kawakami, 1994; Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2006; Irvine, 2003).

These mismatches also create opportunity for miscommunication, misinterpretation, and misunderstanding. In the midst of incongruences, a deficit ideology leads to such things as increased punishment for black males (Ferguson, 2001) and a general consensus that students do not “care” (Valenzuela, 1999). Students of color and of low socioeconomic status are most directly and negatively affected by this racialized, antagonizing way of thinking. Finally, the notion of “at risk” is a present-day example of deficit discourse within education (Valencia, 2010). This pervasive language is used throughout the public education system. Casually applied to students, this classification is treated as demographic data, made available online, and widely used in educational conversations. The deficit basis for the label “at risk” is well described by Valencia and Solórzano (1997):

> At risk has become a person-centered explanation of school failure. The construct of at risk is preoccupied with describing ‘deficiencies’ in students, particularly alleged shortcomings rooted in familial and economic backgrounds of students. Finally, at risk qualifies to be under the rubric of deficit thinking in that the notion pays little, if any, attention to how schools are institutionally implicated in ways that exclude students

from learning. In sum, the idea of at risk blames the victim. (p. 196)

All of this can result in perpetuating a cycle of drop out and underachievement that among students of color, in turn, appearing to confirm the very deficit explanations that supported these issues in the first place.

Anti-deficit thinking. The second, ideological vein stands in contrast and response to the first. Anti-deficit thinking (similar to thinking that holds "additive" (Valenzuela, 1999) and "wealth" (Yosso, 2005) views) interprets students' lack of "success" (defined according to mainstream notions) as a systemic problem (Valencia, 2010). It asserts that students' and their families' cultural beliefs, traditions, knowledge, and skills are not deficient or to blame. Rather, anti-deficit scholars and educators have approached marginalized cultures, traditions, ways, values, and knowledge as something to be drawn from and appreciated (see further discussion of this in the "'Community' in "Successful," Anti-deficit Teaching Practices" section). While "The deficit model turns students into burdens and trades potential for risk" (Valencia and Solórzano, 1997), an anti-deficit ideology seeks out potential, centers on and values students while simultaneously understanding the "risk" that an alienating educational system poses for them.

Scholars operating in multiple pedagogical frameworks also draw from the notion of anti-deficit thinking. Geneva Gay (2000) described some of these:

> Although called by many names, including culturally relevant, sensitive, centered, congruent, reflective, mediated, contextualized, synchronized, and responsive, the ideas about why it is important to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically

diverse students, and how this can be done, are virtually identical. (p. 29)

In addition to these, cultural congruence (Au & Mason, 1983), equity pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 1995), humanizing pedagogy (Bartolome, 1994; Freire, 2009), and funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992), critically compassionate intellectualism (Cammarota & Romero, 2006), critical hip-hop pedagogy (Akom, 2009; Hill, 2009) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 2009; Kincheloe, 2004) also share a similar stance on teaching and education. Committed to educational and social equity for students of color, these theories hold a critical, anti-deficit foundation as essential.

Keeping these ideological foundations in mind, I now turn to literature that has problematized how teachers have understood the notion of "community" and how they have used it in harmful ways within their classrooms.

"Community" as Problematic

Scholars have problematized use of "community" in multiple ways. These have included teacher-based problems, as well as school- and researcher-based issues. All offer compelling arguments for the consideration, use, and research of "community."

Teachers' deficit-based usages. Researchers have brought attention to teachers' deficit epistemologically- and ideologically-based understandings of the notion of "community" and with their urban students' communities. Gay (2010) and Hyland (2005, 2009) have both described how teacher attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs can cause a divide between them and their students and their students' families and cultures (i.e. students' communities). Researchers have further clarified that they have often found both preservice and practicing teachers *unable* (Hyland, 2005; 2009) or *unwilling* (Gay

2010, Groulx, 2001) to connect to urban communities or communities of color. This in turn inhibits these teachers' ability to build these relationships into the classroom. Literature has shown four themes in how teachers' deficit thinking has been manifested: deficit beliefs, racism, naïve and stereotypical understandings, and fear.

Deficit beliefs. The first instance is the straightforward critique that teachers' view their students of color and their communities as "deficient" (Groulx, 2001). Hyland (2009) illustrated just how difficult and ingrained a teachers' ideology can be. In describing a teacher who sought to enact CRP, touted belief in social justice, and recognized students' community as important for "effective" teaching, Hyland (2009) stated that she, "exhibited a great struggle to temper deficit discourses about and to develop relationships with her students' families and the local community" (p. 104). Finally, Philip et al. (2013) considered teachers' collectively constructed deficit beliefs within the context of professional development (PD). Finding their students' communities, "teachers in the PD continually positioned themselves as intermediaries who might 'help students improve their communities'" (Philip et al., 2013, p. 181). All of this underscores the obstinate nature of deficit thinking and the problem it poses for teachers' use of "community" in their classrooms.

Racism. Gay (2010), Groulx (2001), and Hyland (2005) argued that dysconscious racism (Groulx, 2001, p. 62) also causes "community" to be problematic and harmful for students of color. Claiming to be "colorblind" (Gay, 2010, p. 145), White preservice teachers resisted thinking deeply about those who were ethnically, culturally, or racially different from them. She argued that, "racial, ethnic, and cultural attitudes and beliefs are

always present, often problematic, and profoundly significant in shaping teaching conceptions and actions" (p. 143). Considering a White in-service teacher's attempt to be culturally relevant, Hyland (2005) also found that racist thinking and desire to assimilate students into Whiteness inhibited her ability to connect with their "community."

Naïve and stereotypical understandings. Sleeter (2001) brought up the problem of essentialization. Also focusing on preservice teachers, she blamed lack of experience, including cross-cultural experiences as limiting these future teachers' conceptualizations of students of color and their communities. Agreeing with another scholar in the field she wrote, "Schultz et al. (1996) found that preservice student teachers are fairly naïve and have stereotypic beliefs about urban children, such as believing that urban children bring attitudes that interfere with education" (p. 95).

Fear. Surveying 345 preservices teachers regarding their feelings toward teaching in urban settings, Gilbert (1997) uncovered another insidious way that "community" can be a problematic concept. She found that these preservice teachers, having limited experiences with urban communities, drew on media and hear-say. This resulted in deleterious conceptions of urban "communities." She stated, "the element of a dangerous environment was a central theme in many responses" (p. 89) and that the students synonymously aligned their fears of "urban" with race.

Teachers' alienating and exclusionary usages. In addition to deficit-based teacher conceptualizations of "community," scholars have also argued that the notion can be used in ways that alienate and exclude students of color. Extant literature described how teachers' fostering of "community" in the classroom could result in supporting the

status quo—privileging some students while excluding others (Camicia & Franklin, 2010; Fendler, 2006). Speaking of "community" as a concept developed within the classroom (as opposed to that which is outside the school), Fendler (2006) argued that community may have unintended effects of "perpetuating the norms" and "censor[ing] possibilities for difference" (p. 304). She also alluded to alienation when she stated, "community may have undesirable effects like assimilation and homogenization" (p. 304). Philip et al. (2013), agreeing this this, also described the negative impact of "community" saying that it has, "flattened diversity in whole groups of people" (p. 182).

Macro-level problems. Substantive claims about "community" as problematic at macro scalar levels can serve to contextualize the environment teachers work in (i.e. schools) as well as my efforts as a researcher.

Schools' and Researchers' Deficit-thinking. Focusing on schools, Hyland (2009) stated, "deficit discourse is institutionalized in many schools that serve students of color" (p. 105). LeChasseur (2014) recognized this in her interrogation of "community" partnerships. Calling these partnerships into question she stated: "When implied, rather than explicitly interrogated, geographic conceptualizations of community can flatten the myriad experiences within any given locale" (p 307). Further revealing the problematic nature of limited conceptualizations, she described that communities have social spaces and connections to other communities. Throughout all of which, power and privilege is experienced—an unacknowledged complexity in community-school partnerships.

In addition to expressing issues around schools' use of "community," LeChasseur (2014) and Moje (2000) also problematized researchers' use. LeChasseur stated that, "inter-related aspects of community are frequently shorthanded in everyday practice and in educational research" (p. 307) and that, "confounded meanings and intentions are perpetuated by researchers who do not interrogate the multiple meanings of community in their own work" (p. 308). Moje (2000) also argued that literacy researchers must say what they mean when using "community" in their work. She described this dilemma:

> Literacy researchers risk overdetermining, essentializing, and romanticizing what it means to engage in community-based literacy if we do not define what we mean by community and explicitly acknowledge the complex nature of communities, especially the ways in which communities overlap, converge, and conflict…. And regardless of the definition given, many representations of community suggest stable, homogeneous, and relatively fixed grouping of people, a stability and homogeneity that is at odds with the diversity and rapid change represented by new times and fast capitalism. (p. 82)

These researchers provided strong, cautionary critiques that can become a foundation for future works to build on as they approach the concept, "community."

Multi-level Romantization. Moje (2010) and LeChasseur (2014) have both described the romanticization of community and how this seemingly inverted conceptualization also presents a problem. Moje (2010), drew from a critical perspective and spoke of research in the field of literacy to argue that romanticizing "community" effectively denies any unequal power relationships within groups. LeChasseur, (2014) similarly challenged schools and leaders: "community-level collaboration requires an understanding of 'community' beyond its attractiveness in marketing authenticity" (p.

317). Although different than deficit-based problems, this essentializing and reifying approach to "community" is no less problematic.

Summary. This scholarship has illuminated some clear issues that have arisen around the notion of "community." Deficit thinking, as described previously, has been an enduring, far-reaching, and deep-seated ideological foundation that has affected every aspect of society; the concept of "community" is no exception. Yet despite these serious concerns, "community" has also been shown to exist in constructive, empowering ways within teachers' beliefs and practices (e.g. CRP). In the next sections I provide discussion of how "successful," teachers have understood "community" and sought to bring it into their classrooms in constructive ways.

"Successful" Teachers' Understandings of "Community"

As has been suggested throughout this work, terminology can be problematic. As I searched for scant literature on "successful" teachers' understandings of "community" I found several terms overlap: beliefs, conceptions, knowledge, ideology, epistemology, understandings, cognition, and thinking. Although I mostly use the term "understanding," (see definition in chapter 1), I searched broadly for literature that focused on "successful" teachers' understandings of "community" within the U.S. for this review.

Importance of investigating. Through her dissertation research on community-college teachers, de Barling (2001) presented a case for why it is important to consider the beliefs of teachers who work within diverse schools and classrooms. She stated: "teachers' beliefs play a critical role in teachers' practice (Abelson, 1979; Bandura, 1986; Lewis, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1986)" (p. 117). De

Barling's research also connected teacher behavior to the physical characteristics of students. She described that teachers filter new knowledge and experiences through their belief systems and culture. All of this suggests that there is value in studying teachers' understandings—particularly within diverse settings.

Similarly, Pajares (1992) asserted that understanding teachers' beliefs is important for improving professional preparation and teaching practices. Parjares made the following assertions about beliefs—assertions that I believe hold relevance for my work:

> 1. Beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions….
> 2. Individuals develop a belief system that houses all the beliefs acquired through the process of cultural transmission….
> 3. The belief system has an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves….
> 8. Belief substructures, such as educational beliefs, must be understood in terms of their connections not only to each other but also to other, perhaps more central, beliefs in the system….
> 11. Belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon…. Individuals tend to hold on to beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge, even after scientifically correct explanations are presented to them….
> 13. Beliefs strongly influence perception….
> 14. Individuals' beliefs strongly affect their behavior
> 15. Beliefs must be inferred, and this inference must take into account the congruence among individuals' belief statements, the intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner, and the behavior related to the belief in question (Parjares, 1992, pp. 324-326)

One of the overarching arguments brought up through his discussion was that, "[researchers'] findings suggest a strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices" (p. 326), and it is, then, necessary and valuable to investigate teachers' beliefs. The thirteenth assertion also points out that ideology (e.g. anti-deficit) matters. In considering teachers'

understandings of "community," ideological foundations must be recognized. Taken together, de Barling and Pajares present substantial arguments for why it is crucial to consider teachers' beliefs and understandings.

Examples within literature: higher education. Within higher education, I found one article relevant. Noel (2010), herself a faculty member, conducted a self-examination in order to consider her own understandings around her time spent in a school and "community" that partnered with her university's teacher education program. Noel was troubled because she believed that, "in order to effectively educate children in urban settings, teachers must learn about and engage in the communities of their students" (p. 211), yet she also troubled her own understandings saying, "teacher educators themselves often do not have the understanding of poverty, race, class, and school-community dynamics" (p. 212). Her self-revelations suggested that White, "community"-focused teacher educators should: acknowledge "otherness" and challenge one's identity; recognize privilege; commit to staying awhile; build trust; and avoid subtractive relationships. This offers an example of how "community," can be considered in critical, anti-deficit ways, however, "community" here is narrowly conceived in complexity, meanings, and scalar levels represented.

Examples within literature: K-12 teachers. In my review of the literature, I located several pieces that examined how K-12 teachers think about the notion of "community." These included a presentation on the National Teacher of the Year in 1995 (Oliver, 1996); a qualitative study of African-born teachers' perspectives on being a teacher (Ukpokodu, 2012); three cases of community-focused, culturally relevant

teachers (Boutte & Hill, 2006); three examples of anti-deficit, middle-school, urban teachers (Milner, 2008); and discussion of "barrio-based" teachers of Latin@ students (Irizarry, 2011).

While neither Oliver's (1996) nor Ukpokodu's (2012) articles are peer-reviewed, I find they offer some important considerations around teachers' understandings of "community." In an interview Ms. Griffin, 1995 National Teacher of the Year, stated that she believed "community" relationships should be at the core of importance for schools (Oliver, 1996). Explaining this, she shared her experience with the Akhoik community in Alaska. Describing students' struggles with teen alcoholism, pregnancy, and suicide Ms. Griffin pushed for culturally-relevant curriculum and school restructuring efforts, hoping to address these difficulties. Through her interview she conveyed multiple understandings and levels of "community." She asserted that, "the whole world must be our community" (p. 5), students must be "active participants of the community" (p. 7), schools must make "education a part of students' real life" (p. 7), the school should function as, "community and family" (p. 10), and that "community" services should be done through the school to support linking of school and "community."

Throughout it was clear she valued the students. She advocated for respect-based relationships and collaboration between the school (i.e. staff), the classroom (i.e. teachers), and the neighborhood (i.e. students and parents). However, it was not clear as to the extent to which these conceptions of students and "community" were romanticized. Also, the main usages of "community" focused on micro-level perspectives.

Ukpokodu (2012) sought perspectives of teachers born in Africa who were currently teaching in the United States. Wanting to move beyond western conceptions of teaching Ukpokodu asked, "How do African-born teachers in U.S. urban schools conceptualize the 'teacher' and his/her role and characteristics in an African school context?" (p. 41). In answering this, participants strongly drew on the notion of "community;" they described the teacher as "in" or "serving" (p. 45) the "community." Ukpokodu labeled this type of teacher, "the community teacher," and through participant responses, developed the definition: "one, who is intimately invested and integrated into the community; internalizes teaching as a community service, and acts in immeasurable and demonstrable ways to make a difference in the lives of the children and community in which he/she teaches" (p. 45). Ukpokodu found that "the community teacher" aligned well with the culturally relevant teacher but did offer a critique:

> One distinguishing characteristic of the African community teacher that is absent from Ladson-Billing's (1994, 2009) and Murray's (2001) frameworks is the concept of teaching as community service and the identity development and socialization of the teacher to teaching as community service. The identity of the teacher as a 'community teacher' is transcendental as the teacher internalizes his/her role as more than imparting knowledge to students. U.S. Urban [sic] students with challenging lived realities, need teacher who identify, integrate, and invest in the community and see teaching as a community service that is high-stakes; and accept teaching not merely as a 'job' or 'calling' but as one of the service to the community. (p. 47)

So while Ms. Griffin described the necessity for strong relationships between school, classroom, and "community" (Oliver, 1996), Ukpokodu's (2012) teacher participants described "community" as more intimately and deeply connected—to the level of teacher identity. Through both studies "community" was valued, presented as a constructive

piece for teachers, and was most often conceptualized as a micro-level phenomena that indicated a local space just outside of the school.

In another piece, Boutte and Hill (2006) also looked at a specific subset of teachers. They studied three teachers of African American students who they considered culturally relevant pedagogues according to Ladson-Billings' theoretical framework. They argued that, "educators may be informed by a close examination of some of the structural aspects of institutions within the black community such as the barbershop, which views black and male culture as a strength rather than a deficit" (p. 311). This statement reflected their belief that teachers of Black students need an in-depth understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, a consideration of behavior through a cultural lens, an anti-deficit understanding of culture, and a belief that curriculum is neutral.

In studying three "successful" teachers of Black students, they described how each of the teachers had positive, respectful conceptions of "community." While teachers were not specifically asked about what "community" means, it became clear through their work that the teachers' held anti-deficit understandings of "community" and saw it as a resource. It was also evident that the teachers' understandings focused on "community" in physical (i.e. people and place) and cultural (e.g. traditions and epistemology) terms. Though a deeper and more explicit conversation around the "community" construct would further clarify teachers' understandings, Boutte and Hill's work has offered a bridge between CRP, teachers anti-deficit understandings of "community," and "community" within the classroom pedagogically.

Closely related to Boutte and Hill's study, Milner (2008) also examined three urban, middle-school teachers who worked to disrupt deficit notions of difference. Differing from Boutte and Hill's approach, though, Milner focused on teachers' experiences and identity as a source of their successful practice (defined in part through their nomination by their principal) through a critical race theoretical lens. While Milner did not focus on the notion of "community" as a specific concept, experience, or identity that impacted these teachers' pedagogies, community did reveal itself as a significant concept for the teachers. For Mr. Jackson, an African-American, male, Math and Science teacher, his race and culture significantly impacted how he taught and the effectiveness of his role. In addition to this, he was immersed in pop culture, or what he understood as his students' world. His pedagogy, then, reflected this: "And Mr. Jackson was not talking about incorporating 'their world' from time to time in the learning that took place. Rather, he was referring to teachers' actually 'keeping their worlds' in the curriculum and teaching-consistently" (pp. 1581-1582). For Mr. Hall, a White, male, science teacher, culture and income-level, more specifically growing up poor, contextualized and led his pedagogical choices. He spoke of doing more with fewer resources, building sustained relationships with each student, being careful not to silence students, working toward equity (differentiating it from equality), and creating a family model in the classroom. To support a family approach Mr. Hall understood teachers as role models, students as family members who should care about each other and the classroom as a community, working together. This family and community were not limited to the classroom, though, as he believed that sustained family and community extended so that the entire school

became a community. Finally, Ms. Shaw's age and race served as salient identity factors affecting her conceptualizations of teaching. As an older woman, her teacher training and Black cultural understandings teaching as a mission to reach and help other generations:

> She saw part of her roles and responsibilities as a teacher to empower her students to serve and to 'change' their communities. She felt very strongly that there was a need to develop as mindset to serve and be responsible for communities and find ways to change or improve it. (p. 1590)

Ms. Shaw had experienced segregation and racism overtly and worked for equity and social justice. Her role, as she understood it, was multifaceted and fluid, requiring her to be a social worker, parent, and friend at various times. Pedagogically this manifested as the need to teach students life lessons, connect to their lives outside of school, share the importance of unity in school and within their African American community, and work to support students becoming life-long learners. While Milner (2008) did not propose to seek out the teachers' conceptions of community, the experiences and identities that they all drew from were deeply tied to the concept. The teachers' accountings showed understandings of community as a racial concept, as a space, and as a relationship or state—namely unity—as most prominent. Additionally, community was contextualized within anti-deficit understandings that worked to address issues power and work toward equity. For these critical teachers, community seemed to exist as a critical piece of their identity, their epistemology, and, consequently, their pedagogy.

While it can be deduced that the teachers in Milner's (2008) study drew from a community orientation, Irizarry and Raible (2011)'s work specifically focused upon community, or "el barrio" as a foundation from which exemplary (defined by Latin@

students, parents and community members' nomination), urban teachers of Latin@ students drew. Their goal was to share ways in which teachers developed a knowledge base that informed their successful or exceptional teaching. Drawing influence from funds of knowledge, Irizarry and Raible studied 10 exemplary teachers in order to demonstrate ways pedagogy might be enhanced with meaningful and sustained engagement with community—an approach they term "barrio-based." Presented as a question, the researchers asked, how do teachers learn to be effective and culturally responsive?

Interviewing teachers about their teacher preparation experiences and other ways they developed the knowledge base that they had, Irizarry and Raible (2011) found three main influential experience themes: immersion experiences, barrio-classroom connections, and language and other assets. Describing immersion experiences, "home-grown" (i.e. those who grew up in the same area that they were currently teaching) teachers cited living with close proximity to Latin@ families and learning from them. "Transplanted" (i.e. those who did not grow up in the area they were currently teaching) teachers described taking deliberate steps to connect with the area and residents. All of these teachers centered community within their pedagogy. Barrio-classroom connections meant that teachers brought the community's (or local residents') knowledge base into the classroom. Something the researchers termed, "culturally responsive." Barrio-classroom connections also existed through teachers bringing in their personal identity to connect with events and things outside of the classroom. In addition to these two bridges, teachers also taught from marginal perspectives, utilized the human resources of the

community (e.g. parents), and took on a caring stance. Finally, those who indicated language experiences described being monolingual but making significant efforts toward bilingualism, such as refining language skill and expanding cultural knowledge through working and volunteering in Latin America. In all, Irizarry and Raible determined that the teachers' knowledge expanded through their personal involvement and relationships with the community (e.g. the students' family). They stated, "We highlight the emergence of…*barrio-based epistemologies and ontologies* as particularly salient for culturally relevant pedagogy" (p. 199, emphasis in original).

Summary. Throughout this literature there were some prominent ways that K-12 teachers understood "community". First, the concept was conceptualized around students lives (Milner, 2008; Oliver, 1996). That is, "community" was something that existing outside of the classroom and included such things as the people, geography, and organizations that geographically surrounded the school (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008; Oliver, 1996, Ukpokodu, 2012). Another way multiple scholars found teachers understanding "community" was in terms of status. Teachers considered groups of people that shared a particular cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender status to be communities (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008). This seemed to be specifically applied to non-mainstream groups, however. Less described, but still presented by Boutte and Hill (2006) and Irizarry and Raible (2011), was the notion that "community" held relevance and value for teaching and students' education. Finally, teachers' understandings of "community" held affective qualities. The concept was understood in relational terms, supporting student empowerment through a

shared identity (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008), and similarly in environmental (with connotations of relationships) terms, supporting collaboration and care (Boutte & Hill, 2006).

While these pieces reveal some important critical and anti-deficit understandings around "community" that teachers have held, empirical work that explicitly and primarily focuses on teachers' understandings, beliefs, perceptions, or conceptions is meager. Another area that is limited is the careful consideration of "community" in multiple, layered, and dynamic ways. This speaks back to research concerns brought up by Moje (2000) and LeChasseur (2014) who criticized researchers lack of transparency in their use of the term and their lack of fully exploring the term for the multitude of meanings it holds. More work is needed to extend these important pieces by explicitly taking up the notion of "community" and studying teachers' understandings with methods that reveal more complexity of thinking around and intentional use of the construct. Such deeper-focused work might consider conceptualizations within different contexts or meanings "community" at differing scalar levels. Finally, it was not clear if teachers in these studies held conflicting or contradictory understandings about "community." Though clear that some understandings were based in critical, anti-deficit thought, it is not explicitly stated as to whether this is always the case, or if these teachers express deficit understandings at times and for particular purposes. This study takes up these important considerations, adding an alternative perspective, and thus depth, to this important body of scholarship.

Having reviewed literature on teachers' understandings of "community," I will now present work that has considered the notion within the context of the classroom.

"Community" in Anti-Deficit Teaching Practices

Here I present critically-based approaches to pedagogy that illustrate how, "community" has been an foundational part of teachers' anti-deficit teaching practices within their classrooms of color. I have chosen to limit my focus to critically-based discussions of teaching because this aligns with my conceptual framework (presented later). This critical approach to teaching centers considerations of the social context of education but also holds a critical, anti-deficit ideology that understands society as an inequitable, asymetrical system in which some hold power and privilege over others. It calls for reflection about who we, as educators, are and how we fit into this system—a critical consciousness (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Freire, 2009; Howard and Aleman, 2008). Put simply, schooling is understood as a political act (Bartolome 1994; Freire, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 1995). This viewpoint brings about an understanding that interprets differential achievement among student groups as rooted in institutional or systemic realities (anti-deficit) rather than solely based on the individual student (deficit). Gay (2010) stated this well saying:

> The achievement patterns among ethnic groups in the United States are too persistent to be attributed only to individual limitations. The fault lies as well within the institutional structure, procedures, assumptions, and operational styles of schools, classrooms, and the society at large. (p. xviii)

Critical teaching stances, then, hold that all students can succeed if education is reframed in a way that supports their racial and cultural identities and lives.

Broadly considered, "Community" has been included in some instrumental ways within literature that describes critically-based teaching. Within these works, two parallel rationales exist for utilizing the concept of community. The first is a teacher-focused rationale. Literature that uses community in a teacher-focused way, asserts that the notion is useful for teachers to develop a sort of competence in regard to their students, such as how Howard (2006) described becoming a white transformationist teacher. The second is a more student-focused rationale (albeit still holding teaching-based implications) and finds community to be something with which to engage, affirm, and empower students. These go hand in hand and both present a strong argument that "community" matters within "successful" critically-based teaching.

In the following sub-sections I present a few well-recognized teaching frameworks to further illustrate this. These teaching approaches include: culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), critically compassionate intellectualism (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Romero, Arce, & Cammarota, 2009), and critical hip-hop pedagogy (Akom, 2009; Hill, 2009). I begin by providing a short explanation of the framework and then move into how it brings "community" into teaching and the classroom.

"Critical pedagogy." Critical pedagogy, particularly Freire's work, serves as a foundational approach that has informed more current teaching practices. For this reason, I include and begin with this pedagogical stance. Though many scholars have theoretically and practically explored critical pedagogy, one of the most influential

educators was Paulo Freire. In, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2009) described an education that is both humanizing and liberating: "must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (p. 48, italics in original). This calls for privileging and legitimizing of students' knowledge and experiences (Apple, 1993; Freire, 2009; Giroux and Simon, 1988). Giroux and Simon (1988) explained, "Critical pedagogy always strives to incorporate student experience as 'official' curriculum content" (p. 22). Freire and others also argued that a critical consciousness or "conscientization," must be developed and lead to action and social change.

Freire (2009) does not often use the literal term "community," however, the notion is strongly present within his work. First, Freire draws on his experience with a specific people group within a specific locale—often termed by others as "community." Freire (2009), Giroux and Simon (1988), and others have described the importance of drawing on "community" knowledge and advocated for critical dialogue that values, humanizes, and empowers the students. Additionally, Giroux and Simon (1988) stated that the central aim of critical pedagogy is in, "enhancing human possibility and establishing a just and caring community" (p. 23). Freire also wrote about what others have termed "home visits." He asserted that teachers need to form connection with their students and their "community" observing: "the way people talk, their style of life, their behavior at church and at work. They record the idiom of the people" (p. 111).

Not only is critical pedagogy foundational for other anti-deficit approaches to education, it also bridges the concepts of "community" and classroom. The teacher serves

as this bridge when he or she creates classroom space for "community" knowledge and experiences by valuing and personally connecting with his or her students' "community."

"Funds of knowledge" and "community cultural wealth." Aligned with Freire's work, Moll et al.'s (1992) "funds of knowledge" presents a pedagogical approach that draws on students' and their families' knowledge. They stated: "Our claim is that by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools" (p. 132). They also cited the "encapsulated" (p. 134) state of the classroom as problematic because it is isolated from, "social worlds and resources of the community" (p. 134). The researchers found that when teachers enter their students' neighborhoods and homes, they begin seeing and understanding their students' funds of knowledge (e.g. skills and knowledge about various subjects). The teachers were then able to integrate these funds into classroom instruction, projects, etc.

In a similar manner, Tara Yosso's (2005) "community cultural wealth" also finds "community" important for marginalized students' education. Critiquing Bourdieu's work on dominant type of capital through a Critical Race Theoretical lens, Yosso stated that students of color should be seen as possessing "capitals" as well. Referring to her constructed categories of aspirational, social, navigational, linguistic, resistant, and familial capitals, she wrote, "These forms of capital draw on the knowledges Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom" (p. 82).

Through Moll et al.'s and Yosso's work, the importance of "community" for teaching, is clear—both call for a valuing, humanizing, anti-defict bridging of students' "community" and schooling.

"Critically compassionate intellectualism." Cammarota and Romero (2006) and Romero, Arce, and Cammarota (2009) developed a pedagogy they called, "critically compassionate intellectualism" (CCI). Cammarota and Romero (2006) explained CCI:

> A teacher following critically compassionate intellectualism implements the educational trilogy of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1993), authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999), and a social justice centered curriculum (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). For students of color, critical pedagogy affords them the opportunity to become critical agents of social and structural transformation. (p. 14)

Like these other pedagogical approaches, CCI values and legitimizes students' communities. Cammarota and Romero asserted the need for "compassionate relationships" (p. 20) that are built on mutual respect. CCI teachers also shares commonality with culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009) and responsive teachers (Gay, 2010) by supporting a critical consciousness among students that leads to students' social-justice-based action for their community.

Through all of this, the notion of community is both implicitly and explicitly relevant. Pulling from Freire's discussion of humanizing education, Cammarota and Romero (2006) described the need for teachers to construct knowledge *with* students rather than teach *to* them. Through CCI, then, teachers validate students' home or community knowledge, give space for community problems to be discussed, and then encourage students to act to affect change in their community.

"Critical hip-hop pedagogy." The usefulness of hip-hop in education has been presented by several scholars. Bettina Love (2014) asserted its crucial role for students' reading of the world and developing voice, while Christopher Emdin considered within the context of a subject matter (i.e. science) to mitigate alienation (Emdin, 2010) and support academic success (Emdin & Lee, 2012). Reviewing a range of approaches to hip-hop within education, Emery Petchauer (2009) asserted it's relevance for curriculum and learning and language and identity.

A. A. Akom and Marc Lamont Hill have united this approach with a critical stance. Akom (2009) described critical hip-hop pedagogy (CHHP):

> CHHP starts from the premise that hip hop is an important lens for socio-political analysis and representation of marginalized communities, and that youth-driven research on hip hop and popular culture is an instantiation of reading and acting upon the world, that is, critical pedagogy. (p. 55)

Akom continued, stating that CHHP creates a pedagogic space for marginalized youth to develop "conscientização," an anti-deficit, critical awareness of "how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions" (p. 55). This space foregrounds social issues such as racism and values and respects the experiences students bring with them. CHHP encourages participatory, student-driven reflection and discussion. For Akom (2009), hip hop then, becomes a tool to challenge essentialized and stereotyped notions about students while Hill (2009) finds that course texts and students' experiences become narratives, developing "wounded healing" (p. 264).

"Community" is particularly important for critical hip-hop pedagogy. As teachers support students' actions to affect change, the focus in on the students' communities.

Similar to other critical pedagogical stances, CHHP values—and even necessitates—teachers' integration and building off of students' and community's knowledge and experience (Akom, 2009; Hill, 2009). Both Akom and Hill also described how the classroom itself becomes a community. Through CHHP the classroom is transformed into a critical space in which students can share experiences and question social institutions. "Community" also exists as teachers facilitate unity among students. Hill explained this, saying, "students were able to recognize the commonality of their experiences, challenge various ideologies, and produce new knowledge. In doing this, the members of the class forged a cohesive community" (p. 290).

This work presents and draws on multiple meanings of "community." Not only is it described at level of a neighborhood, but it is also described as a particular environment and space within the classroom. This space draws on students' knowledge and communities, but is also a distinct community in of itself. This offers another way to consider "community" within teaching practices.

"Culturally relevant pedagogy" and "Culturally responsive teaching." Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995b, 2009) widely recognized work on CRP painted a picture about how "successful" elementary school teacher of African American students teach. Culturally relevant teachers in Ladson-Billing's work believed that all students could succeed and worked to "dig out" knowledge students already possessed. CRP is formed on three main tenants: the academic success of all students, the maintenance and support of cultural identity, and the development of a sociopolitical awareness and understanding.

These will be described further within discussion on the conceptual framework I use for my research.

Geneva Gay (2010) described very similar traits of "good" teaching as Ladson-Billings. Bringing together similarly aimed literature, she described culturally responsive teaching as, "simultaneous cultivation of the academic success and cultural identity of ethnically diverse students" (p. xviii). Towards this end, she maintained that caring relationships, effective communication, relevant curriculum, and responsive instruction are critical elements for ethnically diverse students' success in the classroom.

"Community" is shown as significant in culturally relevant and responsive teaching. One of the main connections was that culturally relevant teachers are of and for the "community." Ladson-Billings (2009) stated, "Teachers with culturally relevant practice see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same" (p. 41). Gay (2010) also described finding culturally responsive teachers to be, "personally affiliated with and connected to the African American cultural community" (p. 38). One teacher went so far as electing to stay in the "community" despite the fact that she could have gotten a higher-paying job in another school (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The following passage reflects culturally relevant teachers' commitment:

> The teachers made conscious decisions to be a part of the community from which their students come. Three of the eight teachers in this study live in the school community. The others made deliberate efforts to come to the community for goods, services, and leisure activities, demonstrating their belief in the community as an important and worthwhile place in both their lives and the lives of the students. (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 479)

This commitment also led the teachers to thoughtfully foster "community" pride and responsible "community" membership in students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Gay, 2010), bringing "community" members into the classroom, known as "residencies" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

The classroom itself also functioned as a "community," contrasting individualistic approaches to teaching. Ladson-Billings wrote, "They worked to create a community of learners…. This community building was almost always a result of deliberate pedagogical strategies the teachers used" (p. x). Correspondingly, Gay (2010) stated, "Cooperation, community, and connectedness are also central features of culturally responsive teaching. Students are expected to work together and are held accountable for one another's success" (p. 38). A curriculum, rigorous and organized around societal issues while simultaneously supporting the students' communities, was important for culturally relevant classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

All of this indicates how teachers not only sought to bring students' communities into the classroom (e. g. through curriculum and community member visits), but also how they positioned themselves as a part of the "community." Culturally relevant and responsive teachers seemed to deliberately connect "community" within their teaching.

Summary of frameworks. Within these frameworks, a main reason "community" is positioned as important is because it signifies students' ecological environment—a sociocultural influence that affects students' ways of knowing and learning. That is, critical paradigms contend that students are social beings, influenced by race, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family, neighborhood and the like. In

response to this conviction, these approaches value the "student's community." This is a valuable conception of "community."

Beyond this importance, "community" was positioned as integral across this literature in three other ways: 1. the notion of "community" can be used to foster greater student engagement and success in the classroom by redressing issues of cultural mismatch and legitimizing "community" knowledge, 2. "community" holds anti-deficit significance within "successful" teachers' dispositions, understandings, beliefs, and pedagogical choices, and 3. after careful, critical reflection and dialogue, students develop a critical consciousness that leads to actions that support their "communities." Taken together, these researchers' show that "community" is crucially important within "successful" teaching practices within urban classrooms.

While acknowledging the contribution this work has made, I suggest this work can be expanded. Understandings of "community" most often existed at a micro-level of classroom and neighborhood. Although implicit, less explicitly explained is how "community," used in these empowering ways, is conceptualized at other macro levels. For instance, when Arizona banned ethnic studies in 2010, students, educators, and others rallied together in protest creating a district, state, and national "community." *How, then, do students' local communities (particularly those of color) overlap and merge with state, national, and even global "communities?"* From another perspective, *how do students' local communities overlap with other macro level "communities" that they are, perhaps, at odds with?* Examples of this might include "communities" that support border militarization or No Child Left Behind. This question speaks to power dynamics

and center-periphery notions. It also calls romanticized notions of "community" into question. So while important and useful to focus on micro level "communities," these cannot be divorced from the influence of and interaction with macro level "communities."

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

There are a few foundational commitments to which CRP and CHG hold. In order to pair these frameworks as a lens for this study, I begin by presenting these commitments. Because of the complexity and need to bring together multiple authors I will start with CHG. I then turn to CRP as conceptualized by Gloria Ladson-Billings.\

Critical Human Geography

As with any theory, it is messy and somewhat difficult to pare down the Critical Human Geography framework so that it becomes somewhat more tangible to the problem at hand. This being said, in this section I will attempt to do just that. In seeking to utilize CHG as a lens for analyzing community, I will first lay out six general commitments that I believe foundational philosophers and writers agree upon. I am not sure Henry Lefebvre would agree with my outlining these commitments since he emphasized the hypercomplexity of space and even warned of fetishizing it; and I do recognize that in naming these features, I must in some ways simplify and fix understandings of CHG, all the while negotiating the line between understanding space as produced and the "trap of treating space as space 'in itself,' as space as such" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 90). However,

despite this contradiction, I draw on Lefebvre's work around space as a primary basis for this attempt, since the general consensus of those writing about space is that he was largely the founder of CHG.

More recently, Robert Helfenbein (2010) described some main concerns of CHG stating, "To take up critical geography as a theoretical framework means to be concerned with the interrelationships of space, place, power, and identity" (p. 306). Speaking to theoretical use of spatial theory within the field of education, Gulson and Symes (2007) have reported on the field's slowness in taking up the framework despite it having been picked up in the latter part of the twentieth century by social theorists. They asserted the usefulness of spatial theory, "contributes in critically important ways to subtle and more sophisticated understandings" (p. 98). Similarly to Helfenbein, I lay out six main commitments regarding space that CHG supports. These are: space is not neutral, space is (re)produced, space is relevant, space is dialectical, space is discursive, and space is transformative. After describing each of these I discuss how these commitments help to make meaning of "community."

Space is not neutral. The commitment that space is not neutral could possibly be considered the most important or fundamental tenant of the theoretical framework, Critical Human Geography. Living up to its name, CHG theorists view the world through a critical lens that understands space as inherently situated in power and imbued with systems thereof. That is to say, through CHG, power becomes a means with which to understand space, spatial structures, and spatial practice. Space is not neutral.

Lefebvre described a triad of spaces: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. Of these, he asserted that representations of space is a conceptualized space where information is conveyed by maps, communication systems and signs, and exists as the dominant, appropriated, space in society (Lefebvre, 2000). Representations of space is thus, a "mental space" and, "the representations of power and ideology, of control and surveillance" (Soja, 1996, p. 67). In his complex, conceptual wandering of space, Lefebvre also described an "abstract space" which he asserted is a dominant tool. The main emphasis in his well-read work, *Production of Space* (translated from French into English), is that space is not simply a passive locus of social relations untouched by hegemony, but rather that it is politicized.

Building off of Lefebvre's work, Edward Soja (1989) asserted that CHG "is used to explain how and why capitalism exists" (p. 105). In support of this, theorists have explicated various systems. Soja continued that geographically uneven development served as "an essential part of capitalist spatiality" (Soja, 1989, p. 113). He further explained that capitalism seeks to both create its own space and appropriate space for its own purposes. This assertion followed the same vein of Michel de Certeau in his work the year prior. De Certeau (1988) had stated that, "Everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others" (1988, p. xii, italics in original). In addition to uneven development and appropriation, though, Soja (1989) also highlighted systems of surveillance, including the supervising of labor, production, consumption, and exchange. De Certeau (1988), focusing more on the actors within the systems, described his own efforts saying, "The purpose of this work is to make explicit the systems of

operational combination…and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society…is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumers'" (pp. xi-xii). These critical geographers, and others, clearly assert and identify the presence of power and structures in support of this power as elementally existent within spaces.

Space is (re)produced. Beyond critical understandings of space, Lefebvre's main thesis (and the title of his well-known book) is that space is produced. His use of the term "produced" is not to describe space as being created out of nothing, though. Rather, he asserted that space is a social product and thus has a history. As a material entity, he stated that, "no space ever disappears completely" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 403). This is to say that no space is ever a "new" space, but rather a new form of an old space. In agreement with Lefebvre, Helfenbein (2010) described the process of "deterritorialization," relating it to the process of globalization, and "reterritorialization," or the continuous evolving of space. He declared, "Indeed, *de*territorialization holds a predominant part of the process of the globalized condition but this is no end, no death, as inevitably spaces become reterritorialized by forces both structural and (yes and!) agentic" (Helfenbein, 2010, p. 307, emphasis in original). These declarations support an understanding of space as an ever-evolving entity, shaped and produced into new forms, never relenting into a status of nonexistence, by forces, dominant or revolutionary, upon it. As can be understood, spaces are also not reproduced in the sense that they are exact replicas of previously existing spaces as the term might indicate elsewhere. For these reasons I have chosen to use parenthesis to describe this spatial understanding of CHG. In what follows, however,

when production is simply used rather than (re)production, the word should be understood through this CHG expression of it.

Space is dialectical. Further muddying this discussion of space as a produced entity, Lefebvre also delineated that this production is often dialectical. He described how entities, such as power and knowledge, are both contradictory and interdependent, relating and interacting in non-linear ways. For instance, while capitalism and neocapitalism produce abstract space (Lefebvre, 2000), struggles simultaneously produce ruptures within that space (Soja, 1989). This dominance-revolt dialectic offers a clear example of this conflicting, contradictory, dynamic, and dialectical, productive interacting. Though Lefebvre recognizes the inherent power or dominance of space (also referred to as the center), he and others also describe how ruptures or revolts take place in response from the dominated, periphery, or margins.

Another way that space has been described dialectically is through levels or scale. That is, simply put, the interaction between the whole and parts, the macro and the micro. This interaction highlights Lefebvre's description of various spatial levels: local, regional, national, and global. Kipfer, Saberi, and Wieditz (2012) described Lefebvre as understanding scales of urban, the intermediate level, state, the macro level, and everyday life, the micro level. They went on to tell of the important involvement of the urban with mediating the social whole, while being dialectically tied with its content, the contradictory level of everyday life. Situating urban questions within this relation foregrounds the role of everyday life, state, and political action in center-periphery relationships rather than just the role of collective consumption (Kipfer et al., 2012).

Lefebvre also described the dialectical relationship the social and spatial have with each other stating, "*Social spaces interpenetrate [sic] one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another*" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 86, emphasis in original). An example of this he gave was between work and play spaces, or, respectively, daytime and nighttime spaces. He asserted that while leisure spaces appear to be spaces of play and thus, seemingly, have escaped the control of capitalism, or the dominant space of work, they are in fact transformed into an industry and thus continue to serve as a neocapitalistic tool for dominance. Soja (1989), reiterating Lefebvre's point, described that the "key premise of socio-spatial dialectic [is] that social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent." An understanding of space as dialectical allows for consideration of systems, scales, and subjects within these spaces in a constant play, so-to-speak, which challenges simplistic dualistic and fixed notions. It is through dialectical interactions, spaces are constantly produced. Kipfer et al. (2012) summed this up well saying:

> Lefebvre's analysis allows us to think about territory, space, and state together, and thus to examine the historically and geographically specific political forms of the co-production of space and territory (state space as territory) through the dialectics of their perceived, conceived, and lived dimensions. (p. 123)

Space is discursive. Continuing to build upon the, dominant, evolving, and dialectical characteristics of space, Lefebvre (2000) further described the discursive nature of space. Explaining how language and codes are inherent in spatial production, he stated: "a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a

means of living in that space, of understanding it, and producing it" (p. 64). He continued to argue the intimate relationship between language and spaces stating, "Every language is located in space. Every discourse says something about a space…and every discourse is emitted from a space" (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 132). As Soja (1998) described social relations being space-contingent, so it could also be applied to language. Language, "located in space," might be said to be contingent on that space. It could also be argued that language, codes, and other discourse exist and are given meaning within space. Combining the dominant character of space, this could be continued to say that space determines what language and discourse is even allowed. In struggling to understand this relationship, Lefebvre (2000) asked, "Does language…precede, accompany, or follow social space?" (p. 135). De Certeau's writing on narrative helps tease through this question in some ways.

De Certeau (1988) emphasized discourse through his discussion of stories and space. His descriptions underscored how stories can in some ways exist across spaces, organizing and linking places together, revealing spatial trajectories. "In this respect, narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes…. they regulate changes in space" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 115). In this way, it might be understood that discourse is not only discursively, but also dialectically involved with space—it exists within space, and yet can also transcend space in some regards. He continued by including place within this interplay between discourse and space. In defining place, connected to location, and space, a practiced place produced and situated within time, de Certeau further described how stories link place and space: "Stories thus carry out a labor that constantly

transforms places into spaces or spaces into places" (p. 118). Stories, he asserted, delimit place. All of this might seem contradictory with Lefebvre's discussion of discourse, but considering postmodern and dialectical characteristics of space allows for and, indeed, encourages these contradictions, complexities, and tensions. Perhaps the answer to Lefebvre's question, "Does language…precede, accompany, or follow social space?" is yes, discourse does all, intricately involved with space through multiple facets.

Space is relevant. Having considered some other, perhaps seemingly more abstract, commitments of CHG, I think it now useful to make explicit the commitment of space as integrally relevant in everyday life, or as Lefebvre described, to the social. Lefebvre (2000) made this clear when he stated, "Social relations…have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial*" (p. 404, emphasis in original). CHG theorists have asserted that space needs to be fore fronted partly because it directly affects the lived experience. That is everyday life is situated within space and, thus, each of the previously mentioned aspects of space can be applied to the social, to everyday life. Indeed, de Certeau (1988) entitled his book, "The Practice of Everyday Life." This work provided an application of the other spatial characteristics already mentioned (not neutral, (re)produced, dialectical, and discursive), with a specific focus on the dominating and agentic aspects of space, and, consequently, the dialectical relationship between these two. Also describing the relevance of CHG to the micro level of lived experience, Soja (1998) described how capitalistic choreography of controlled consumption leads to spatial planning that infiltrates and affects all aspects of everyday life. Referring to Lefebvre, he also connected everyday agentic efforts, or social struggle,

with production, stating that, "the social struggle in the contemporary world…[is] inherently a struggle over the social production of space" (p. 70).

Even more clearly illuminating the importance for a spatial framing of everyday life, Kipfer et al. (2012) expanded on Lefebvre's discussion of levels (i.e. state, urban, and everyday life), showing the relevance of these spaces to the micro—everyday life. First, connecting state to everyday, they stated that, "Lefebvre treats the state as an institutional condensation of social power, but he also emphasizes the presence of the state (state-like thinking and symbolism) in everyday life" (p. 123). They then focused on the connection of the urban to the micro describing relevance to identity and the individual or group:

> Most importantly, the urban understood as a level of social reality ties urban analysis systematically back to matters of everyday life, which, in turn, is of paramount significance for considerations of class, gender, 'race', and sexuality as lived, bodily experience. (Kipfer et al., 2012, p. 124)

So here we can see the attention given to relevant issues and experiences as an important part of the interplay between state, urban, and experience. CHG then, is understood as making real and material connections. Not only is CHG a fluid and flexible framework, but also very practically applicable.

Space is transformative. Intimately intertwined with the other previously described commitments of CHG, the transformative aspect of space has already come up within these discussions. However, such an important concept deserves its own special focus. In describing dominant spaces produced through capitalism and neocapitalism, Lefebvre (2000) also described revolution. He stated that revolution must be involved in

production of a new space. Tying this in with the previous commitment of relevance to everyday life, he further declared that, “To change life, however, we must first change space. Absolute revolution is our self-image and our mirage — as seen through the mirror of absolute (political) space” (p. 190). Space, then, must be involved with any efforts to address injustices people face as a part of their lived experiences. Continuing to focus on the relevance of space in relationship with an actor, de Certeau (1988) was concerned with the “user” and how s/he operates within space, exerting agency through resistance. He gave specific examples of this, describing how one uses systems in resistance and strategies to “produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, tactics only use manipulate, and divert” (p. 30), and resists through subversion. Expanding on this final example he described, “They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it” (p. 32). This is quite similar to Lefebvre’s describing the transformation of space by ‘users’ or ‘inhabitants,’ as they use their imagination to seek change and even appropriation of dominant spaces.

Soja (1989) shed light on how an inherently dominating space can become a space of agency and transformation. He stated that the very geographically uneven development that is essential for capitalist spatiality, indeed leads to resistance through social struggle and a (re)production of that very space. Referenced previously, Helfenbein (2010) also described this in his discussion of spaces inevitably becoming reterritorialized through the dialectical interplay of structural and agentic forces. Soja (1989) called for an awareness of this transformative process as a unique commitment of CHG saying:

> Critical human geography must be attuned to the emancipatory struggles of all those who are peripheralized and oppressed by the specific geography of capitalism…. And it must be especially attuned to the particularities of contemporary restructuring process and emerging regimes of 'flexible' accumulation and social regulation…to contribute to a radical postmodernism of resistance. (p. 74)

Also contributing insight around the revolutionary aspect of space, Kipfer et al. (2012) have more recently defined social struggle in terms of "right to the city" discussions. They described how claiming right to a city is about struggle within social spaces which assert revolutionary perspectives and through which a right to difference emerges. Again, this is a dialectical process between the center and periphery, in which oppressed marginal groups revolt against the center's dominating of them. Further explaining this concept they wrote:

> 'right to the city', which, far from an isolated legal right to particular physical spaces, was meant to highlight the 'strategic importance of the urban' in social struggle (Uitermark, 2004), a usually fleeting, not physically fixed, form of spatial and social centrality produced in a convergence of radical or revolutionary politics. (Kipfer et al., 2012, pp. 128-129)

Before leaving this point, an important emphasis and contribution highlighted by this quote is the notion of convergence. That is, Kipfer et al., in the previous quote and in their continuing discussion, illuminated how multiple peripheral groups, those "socially differentiated and spatially uneven political forces" (p. 129), may converge in their resistance against the center. This powerful understanding of resistance highlights the importance of the collective.

Review of geography utilized within education literature. Supporting my assertion that CHG is useful for the examination of teachers' conceptualizations of

community and their related pedagogical choices, I present how geography has already been drawn on within some multi-culturally-focused, educational literature.

Through my search, I was able to find several studies that held some relevance. Within these articles, geography was utilized to consider: classification and terminology (e.g. urban, suburban) (Buendia, 2011) and social production related to the concept of "urban" (Morgan, 2012); parental choice in selecting a school for their child(ren) (Bell, 2009); globalization and migration (Buenfil-Burgos, 2009; McConaghy, 2006b; Sprecher, 2013) and globalization and sociospatial power relations (Lipman, 2005; Schmidt, 2011); education as a market and parents as consumers (Cucchiara, 2008); Teachers teaching in unfamiliar places (McConaghy, 2006a); learning environments (Steward, 2008); student identity (Zacher, 2006); and political responsibilities of schools and teachers (Schmidt, 2011; Zhuang, 2007). In addition to bringing up these relationships between geography and education-connected topics, a few others focused specifically on teaching. Burns (2009) spoke to the academic subject of writing while Schmidt (2011) called for a broader understanding of the importance of geography as a subject. Beyond this, Duhn (2012) and Ellis (2004) presented their understandings of how and why geography is relevant and important for pedagogy and curriculum.

Though I have presented an overview of some work that connects CHG to education, Taylor (2009) took up a similar review of the use of geography within education-focused articles. Taylor stated, "the paper utilizes the geographically-related concept of *scale* to provide a framework from which we can systematically explore the relationship between geography and education" (p. 657, emphasis in original). He made it

clear that his work was, as mine has been, concerned with human geography as a framework used within education, not at considering the teaching of the academic subject of geography. From his reviewing of these types of works, he was able to describe six layers or levels, from a micro to macro scale that the literature represents. These levels of education, from micro to macro with the geographic scale in parentheses, included: learner (e.g. child), site of learning (e.g. school or household), community of learners (e.g. neighborhood), local authority (e.g. region), central government (e.g. nation), and international. Taylor found that most of the work he reviewed was done at macro levels and that there was not much ranging across levels.

Concerns brought up by the literature. Reviewing the literature there were a few issues that presented with regard to how CHG has been used. Some of these problematic usages were highlighted by some of the authors of the articles, and some are my own concerns. These include: lack of explanation when using specific geographic terms, use of a geography framework in superficial ways, uncritical uses of a geography framework, and using a limited geographic framework.

First, as already discussed in the beginning of the previous section, Buendia (2011) brought up the problematic ways that terms, such as "urban" are often used, but not explained. In doing so he has challenged researchers to be deliberate and transparent in their uses of ambiguous, contested, and power-imbued geographic terms. There are other geographically-connected terms whose usage should also be scrutinized. From my own area of interest, I would add the term "community" to this list. It too has been used in ambiguous, uncritical, and even marginalizing ways (see my discussion of the term

"community" as used within educational literature in chapter 2, "Meaning of Community"). In all, when drawing on a CHG framework, terminology should always be questioned and usage explained. Because the framework creates room for, and indeed even demands, shifting and interplay of concepts, it is imperative that the researcher is clear in his/her approach to important terms and concepts in his/her work.

A second and similar concern brought up is the use of CHG in superficial ways. After reviewing educational literature that claimed to draw on a geographic framework, Taylor (2009) stated, "much use of geography in education research does not go beyond utilizing he language and vocabulary of geography" (p. 652). Along these same lines, Morgan (2012) reminded researchers that geography should hold significance for our work. That is, CHG should be used because it expands and deepens studies and not simply because it *can* be added or because the terminology seems convenient. The researcher should also make clear when s/he is drawing on geography as a framework versus when s/he is merely studying geography as a part of learning (e.g. an academic subject or merely a setting for learning to take place).

The use of CHG without focused attention on issues of power is also problematic. This can also arise when geography is used superficially, as the previous concern brings attention to. Even when geography is drawn on in a more substantial way, however, researchers can still overlook somewhat hidden issues of power. For instance, despite my attempts to find critical education literature for my review, I still came across articles that did little to address issues of power as related to geography. One example from my search was Bell (2009). Bell sought to consider how geography influenced parental choice in the

school their middle or high school students attended in Detroit. However, while Bell presented some discussion on geography and made an argument for geography being involved in parent decision making, there was a lack of discussion, for instance, about how geography empowers or marginalizes parents and how this in turn affects their ability to even have a choice in the first place among other things. In terms of CHG as a framework, this piece could be used to illustrate both interrelated concerns of superficial and uncritical use.

The final concern around using CHG was brought up by Taylor (2009). His review brought up a common theme—that research often pigeon-holes, or limits geography by taking a singular approach. That is, when considering levels of education and geography from micro to macro, he found that most work situated itself within one micro level, such as "learner/child" with little or no attention given to other potentially rich and connected layers or levels. I also observed that within the literature I reviewed, there was often a more singular use of geography (e.g. as a specific geographic place). While this can allow for a more tidy use of CHG, it certainly does not do the postmodern framework justice. For this reason, it is important for researchers to consider multiple levels and types of space—as well as the dialectical and discursive relationships thereof—while at the same time being diligent to clearly present these tensions and struggles so that the other concerns, already brought up, are not fallen into.

In conclusion, there are areas to attend to when using CHG as a theoretical framework. I have worked to address these issues in my study (e.g. being transparent

about my use of and struggle with terms in chapter one) as CHG offered a powerful and substantially useful framework for my work.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In addressing my research questions, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (capitalized here to signify my use of it as a theoretical framework) offered a useful way to understand and theorize teachers' practice. This influential framework was developed out of Gloria Ladson-Billings ethnographic study of eight "successful" teachers of African American elementary students. While broadly focused on culture and race, Ladson-Billings (1995b, 2009) presents three commitments of CRP, unified out of various approaches of "successful" teachers. These are: 1. culturally relevant teachers are committed to students academic success within dominant institutions, 2. culturally relevant teachers are committed to support, value, and encourage students to develop a competence in their cultural and ethnic identities, and 3. culturally relevant teachers actively engage students in social questioning and critique, helping them develop a sociopolitical consciousness. I will describe each of these main commitments and some characteristics held by the teachers themselves. Throughout these descriptions I primarily draw on Gloria Ladson-Billings' book, "The Dreamkeepers" (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and her in-depth article, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Finally I describe critical foundations that undergird CRP and what all of this means for my research.

Academic Achievement. Central to mainstream conceptions of teacher "success," CRP mandates that the students of "successful" teachers experience academic

achievement as measured by standardized instruments. Acknowledging the flawed nature of these measurements, culturally relevant teachers also recognized the importance for students to succeed in this area. This understanding reveals some level of critically-based thinking among the teachers.

Cultural Competence. In addition to experiencing academic success, CRP also maintains that students must not do so at the expense of their "cultural and psychosocial well-being" (p. 475)—their identities. Rather culturally relevant teachers draw on students' identities in the classroom, legitimizing them by drawing on students' identities and knowledge as curriculum and as a way to scaffold mainstream knowledge.

Sociopolitical consciousness. "Not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 476). This sociopolitical consciousness requires first that the teacher hold a critical understanding of the world and systems of inequality. Culturally relevant teachers must then actively engage with students to help them come to this understanding themselves as well. Finally, this consciousness should lead to strategic action that works against inequality.

The Culturally Relevant Teacher. In seeking to make these "successful" teachers practices more approachable, Ladson-Billings presented three propositions about the teachers themselves. First, she found that the teachers held an anti-deficit ideology through which they respected and valued their students and encouraging them to value themselves; "Teachers with culturally relevant practices have high self-esteem and a high regard for others" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 37). She also described the teachers'

connectedness with the students and their families as significant. She described that the teachers "consciously create[d] social interactions to help them meet the three previously mentioned criteria of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 480). This involved not only teacher-student relationships, but also student-student relationships that encouraged collaboration. Finally, the teachers in her study held onto certain conceptions of knowledge. Ladson-Billings (1995b) explained their views of knowledge saying:

- Knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed.
- Knowledge must be viewed critically.
- Teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning.
- Teachers must scaffold, or build bridges, to facilitate learning.
- Assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence. (p. 481)

Through this, a picture of what a "successful" teacher looks like is presented.

Critical Theoretical Foundation. As described in the review of literature and is evident from the main commitments, CRP is founded on critical theory. This supports interpretation of pedagogy with a critical lens that questions hegemonic and assimilative actions, asymmetrical power relations, and deficit ideological beliefs. Teacher pedagogy, contextualized within this framework must interrogate the ways "community" exists within these inequitable systems of power; how it supports these systems of power or is marginalized by them. Such concepts as race, culture, and ethnicity become important within this context. Informed by CRP I considered: How are teachers' understandings of "community," of their students' "community", and their efforts to bring the notion into their teaching affected by culture, race, and positions of power (e.g. being the teacher)?

It is also pertinent to consider that some have critiqued CRP saying that cultural relevance terminology is limiting and inadequate. Paris (2012) asserted that culturally relevant or responsive does not convey strong revelations of power and identity as aimed at by the framework. Paris (2012) called for the term "culturally sustaining pedagogy" as a way to address this. In "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix," Ladson-Billings responded to these accusations. In doing this she described the intended and necessary fluidity of CRP as well as the need to be open for reconceptualizing or "(r)evolving" (p. 77) so that a pedagogical approach doesn't become stale, static, and lose its power. In this work I continue with CRP as it was initially termed, but I work to maintain it's theoretical integrity as well as its fluidity as I pair it with CHG.

Pairing CHG and CRP

Combining the theoretical frameworks of CHG and CRP requires some creativity as both hold distinct differences. CHG was developed as a theoretical framework to consider social issues tied to geographically and spatially uneven development while CRP was born from a need to better understand characteristics of "successful" teachers of students of color. CHG also draws from a postmodern paradigm, whereas CRP does not. However, despite this, both hold a critical foundation that bridges their differences.

I believe it is the very differences that make pairing CHG and CRP useful as my conceptual framework, though. While CRP is useful for considering what "good" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) urban teaching looks like, CHG offers a critique for a static notion of "community." So while both consider the world through a critical lens of

inequity and uneven development and power, each offers a unique perspective for contextualizing and analyzing what understandings "successful," urban, middle-school teachers hold about the notion of "community," how they understand their student of color's "communities," and how "community" is seen within their teaching practices.

In the next chapter I include continued discussion of these frameworks and how they helped me approach my data analysis. Prior to this, though, I present the methodology I used for this study, the site and participant context of this work, and my data collection methods.

Chapter 3: Research Design

OVERVIEW

In the previous chapter I contextualized this study by providing discussion of germane literature and how this study extends this important work. As described, the purpose of this study is to respond to scholars' critiques of the term and concept, "community," and to build on work that has looked at "successful" teachers' understandings of "community" and their use of "community" in classroom teaching practices. Extending this previous work, this study focused on "successful," urban teachers who taught students of color in order to examine how they understood the notion of "community," how they understood their students' communities, and how these understandings are connected to their teaching practices in the classroom.

In conducting this research, I drew from a specific methodological approach that informed my chosen research methods. Here I will describe this methodology and then the particular methods I have chosen to support the investigation of my research questions. Included in the section on methods I describe the type of study I used, the aims of this work, my research questions, discussion of the research site and participants, my data collection and analysis methods, the trustworthiness and limitations of this study, and how I, personally, entered into this research.

METHODOLOGY

Crotty (1998) described a hierarchical structuring of research design that I found useful for laying out this research project. His structure was progressive, beginning with an epistemological foundation, which in turn lead to theoretical perspective(s). This perspective informed the methodological approach to a study, which then informed which methods were useful for a study. I drew on this research structure for organizing and describing the underpinnings of my research and how I approached my data collection—my philosophical stance as a researcher.

Epistemological Foundation

I found a constructivist paradigm to fit well with how my research questions framed this study. That is, I was not interested in uncovering the one or the "correct" meaning of "community" or the "right" way to conceptualize students' communities; rather, I was interested in what meanings specific teachers have constructed around the notion. This fundamentally positions knowledge as constructed—and varying across contexts—by people. Michael Crotty confirmed this use of constructivism stating:

> It is the view that *all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context*. (Crotty, 1998, p. 42, italics in original)

More specifically than this, Crotty (1998) also described that we are all cultural beings and that it is this culture that allows us to function as it directs our behavior and organizes our experiences. Approaching knowledge as constructed through social and cultural

influences supported the underpinnings of race and culture (part of my definition of urban) within this study.

Theoretical Perspectives

Moving through Crotty's research design structuring and from the macro level of constructivism, I chose two theoretical perspectives: a critical perspective and a postmodern perspective. These offered useful ways to address my research questions on teachers' understandings and teaching practices. Crotty (1998) wrote: "For each theoretical perspective embodies a certain way of understanding what is (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding what it means to know (epistemology)" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Acknowledging this important consideration and a constructivist foundation, I believed that critical and postmodern theoretical perspectives do two things: they ontologically depend on the existence of potential meanings for "community" and epistemologically depend on teachers' understandings of "community" being constructed through sociocultural realities.

Beyond this basic ontological and epistemological premise and through a critical perspective (i.e. culturally relevant pedagogy—CRP) I maintained that teachers' sociocultural realities exist within the context of asymmetrical power relations; that schooling is a political endeavor; and that teachers are not unaffected by this power, but rather hold a place within it. Adding a postmodern perspective (i.e. critical human geography—CHG), further complicated this by calling into question the ability for any understandings to be static—even those that are already understood as relative to and constructed by an individual person. In all, my use of these two perspectives mandated

that "community" does exist, but that its meaning is constructed by teachers, and that these constructions can change across time and space.

Rationale for Methodology

My choice to use a social constructivist paradigm and critical and postmodern theoretical frameworks supported an approach to data collection (talked about in the next section) that is in line with my research questions. First, this methodological framing supported a focus on urban, "successful" teachers as individuals who hold their own individualized understandings around "community." This focus on teachers' individually constructed beliefs was important when considering how this connects to their classroom teaching practices as De Barling (2001) and Gay (2010) described.

Finally, as already touched upon, the pairing of critical and postmodern perspectives approaches my research questions in two distinct, but mutually significant ways. I have described that my focus on urban teachers necessarily included recognizing inequitable power distribution along cultural and racial lines; a critical perspective allows for this standpoint to be accounted for within teachers' understandings. Extending this, a postmodern perspective allows for the messiness of the notion, "community." This is important because I recognized there are many conceptualizations of community—including contradictory ones (Camicia and Franklin, 2010). So even as I worked to clearly define understandings that teachers hold about "community," I did not want to minimize the complexity and dynamic nature of the notion. In asking how teachers understand "community" more broadly, prior to asking how they understand their

students' communities, I aimed to create room for multiple, shifting, and contradictory conceptions—a postmodern perspective supports this.

METHODS

Crotty's (1998) hierarchical structuring of research design asserts that my chosen epistemological foundation would help determine my theoretical approaches to my study, which in turn revealed what methods were most useful for answering my research questions around urban, "successful" teachers.

Type of Study

Since a constructivist framing depends on knowledge being relative for each person, use of a case study approach for my research was reasonable. And although Crotty's research design had been useful in revealing the interrelatedness of my methodology, I then turned to Thomas' (2011) and Yin's (2014) descriptions of case studies in order to describe my research methods. Using Thomas' (2011) terminology, I had chosen to use an instrumental, descriptive, multi-case study because it offered a bounded, in-depth look at cases (i.e. teachers) in order to better understand the unique elements of how each one understands "community" and how this is part of their classroom teaching practices. As Thomas (2011) stated, the case study "concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalize from it" (p. 3).

Yin (2014) presented another rationale for using a case study method. He wrote that case study is a preferred method when, "(1) the main research questions are 'how' or

'why' questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of study is a contemporary … phenomenon" (p. 2). Each of these criteria fit with my study; I had chosen "how" questions to examine teachers' conceptualizations and behavior rather than choosing to implement an experimental intervention. Also, my focus was on a contemporary or current phenomenon. I had also chosen a multiple- or collective-case study because, "the focus is unequivocally on the phenomenon of which the case is an example: the focus is on the object" (Yin, 2014, p. 141). I entered focused on the notion of "community" within various teachers' understandings and practices, rather than on the phenomenon of one particular teacher's thinking and practice.

Research Aim

The aim of this research was two-fold: to build on literature that has problematized the notion of "community" and to extend work that has considered "successful" teachers' conceptualizations of "community" and their use of "community" in the classroom.

As presented in chapter 2, scholars have pointed to problematic uses of the term and notion of "community." They have pointed to "muddy" (Fendler, 2006) uses of the term—as result of it being ill-defined or un-defined. Others have described how students' communities can be conceptualized in negative, deficit ways (Gay, 2010; Hyland, 2005; 2009) and misappropriated by teachers (Philip et al., 2013) potentially leading to harmful uses of the concept the classroom. In recognizing the validity of these arguments, I sought to respond by examining how "community" might exist within "successful," urban teachers' thinking and practice. In focusing on those who have experienced

"success" in the eyes of their students and administrators, I hoped to find ways that "community" can exist in anti-deficit ways that support students rather than being harmful.

In addition to responding to how "community" has been positioned as problematic, this study also worked to extend research that has already examined how "successful" teachers think about "community" and how they use "community" within the classroom. While researchers have presented several ways that teachers have conceptualized "community," it has not been entirely clear as to how, or if, these teachers hold multiple, shifting, or conflicting understandings of community and how this is connected to their classroom teaching practices.

Finally, this work also extends CRP and related efforts by looking at cases of *middle-school* teachers whose classrooms are *multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual* (this will be discussed further in the upcoming section, "The Research Site"). Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) described a similar need for studies that focus on culturally relevant classrooms that are "truly multi-cultural" (p. 444). For these reasons, I believe my research is distinctive, building upon and enhancing other important work.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this qualitative, instrumental, descriptive multi-case study (Thomas, 2011) include:

> *1. How do successful, urban, middle-school teachers working with students of color understand the concept of "community" in relation to their work with these students?*

c. *How do these teachers understand the communities in which their students participate and are a part?*

d. *How do these teachers understand themselves in relation to their students' communities?*

2. How do these teachers approach and draw from their conceptions of "community" in their classroom practices?

The Research Site

Understanding the context of this study is important not only for potential replicability, but also for consideration of this work in relation to others' work; in this section I describe my chosen research site. For this study I selected teacher participants who taught at Hunter Middle School (a pseudonym).

Description of the site.

In presenting this description I begin at a more macro level by describing the city and geographic area that surrounds the school. I then turn to the demographic description of the school where my participants teach. CHG asserts the importance of attention to scale, understanding spaces as nested within each other. Hunter Middle School (HMS) is nested within a city in the southwestern part of the United States. Census population data classifies it as a mid-sized city but as bordering the threshold of moving into large-sized status. This city is unique in that it is quickly changing. It is among the fastest growing cities in the United States (Badger, 2015) and the area surrounding HMS has shifted from a suburban status to an urban status over the past several decades (Rothrock, 2015).

Additionally, in 2003, Refugee Services of Texas opened an office just three miles from HMS and currently places families within the middle school's attendance zone.

Examining the most recent census-based demographic maps (see figures 3.1 through 3.7) of the city, it becomes clear that it holds onto deeply ingrained de facto segregation (Winkie, 2014)—this is not in opposition to the state's condition of persisting Jim Crow-era segregation (Heilig & Holme, 2013). These 2010 population mappings of White and African American residents (figures 3.1-3.2) reveal a start contrast of White folks living predominately in the west areas of the city and Black folks living predominately in the east. Looking at figure 4 contributes a similar, albeit more dispersed, phenomenon for the Latin@ population. All of this illustrates that race plays a significant factor within the city as a whole.

These maps also help to conceptualize the "urban" characteristics of the area immediately surrounding HMS (this general area is circled on each map). This micro-level area—or neighborhood—reflects similar racialized characteristics held by the city and, as Heilig and Holme (2013) have described, the state. That is, HMS is largely non-white, though there is diversity within this predominately non-white population. Because Black residents make up only eight percent of the city's population, figure 3.2 is limited in its ability to fully portray Black residential patterns in the city. For this reason I included figure 3.3. This absolute number data shows that, relative to the low population percentage, there is a significant number of Black individuals in the area surrounding HMS. Finally, Figures 3.6 and 3.7 reveal two more characteristics of the area: a predominately low-income status and a high percentage of foreign-born population. As a

result of the inner-city location, high non-white population, and low-income population, I define HMS as an "urban" school.

Turning to HMS's specific demographic data, nine percent of the approximately 1,100 students are African American, eighty-three percent are Hispanic, four percent are White, and two percent Asian (Texas Education Agency, 2014). These demographics, while useful, are also limited. One reason for this is that terms are undefined. "Hispanic" has been used in ways that address race, ethnicity, or language. This term, then, offers ambiguity at best. Another difficulty is that students of varied heritage are not represented. For instance, while I have personally observed that the school serves students of Middle Eastern heritage, this is not known from the population report.

Other demographic information for HMS was provided in the district's reports. It was reported that 92 percent of the student population is considered to be economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2014). This also matches the area's large percentage of low-income population. Finally, native or non-native status is addressed within the school's demographic data, however, 43 percent are labeled as English Language Learners (ELL) (Texas Education Agency, 2014) and given the city's mapping and the location of the Refugee Services of Texas office, it is reasonable to expect that this too is represented within HMS.

Rationale for Choosing Site.

Literature that has problematized "community" has attended to teachers (often White teachers (Hyland, 2005, 2009)) who teach students of color. Similarly research on "successful," "urban" teachers conceptions and use of "community" has also focused on

this population. In line with this previous work, then, this study continues to examine teachers who serve students of color.

This research also extends scholars' work by focusing on a racially and culturally varied student population. While not equally diverse in racial representation, there is still variety of representation within the student population. The African American student population is only nine percent within the school, however, this is slightly above the average within the district, which is seven percent (Texas Education Agency, 2014). Finally, the unique characteristic of having a refugee placement site within the attendance zoning, paired with the city's mapping of foreign-born population (figure 3.7) and the 43 percent ELL within the HMS student population shows that there is a diversity ethnicity, culture, and national heritage present within the school. This diversity within the classroom adds an additional layer of complexity and challenge for teaching that may result in more complex understandings of "community." For instance, teachers' understandings of "community" may be pushed to include macro level conceptualizations when the classroom includes students with multi-national identities. Examining how teachers understand and use "community" when a multitude of student communities are represented in the classroom, then, extends literature that has often considered "successful" teaching.

Participants

This study focuses on three, middle-school teachers who were identified as "successful" through an administrator, faculty, and student nomination process. (This

characteristic of "success" includes micro and macro level indicators as described in chapter 1.) Each of these teachers worked at HMS, a public middle school, during the 2015-2016 school year. The reason I selected to focus on three teachers is that this presents multiple cases with which to cross-examine themes. However, limiting the number of cases also ensures that only the most "successful" teachers are selected.

The purpose of selecting "successful" teachers is that it presents opportunity to consider how "community" is sometimes understood and used in non- and anti-deficit ways—ways that do not misappropriate students' communities or alienate them. Learning about teachers who are "getting it right," so-to-speak, also compliments other work (e.g. Ladson-Billings (1995a)) that gives us hope that teaching *can* support all students. These cases, then, serve as exemplars, providing insight into how "successful" teachers conceptualize "community" and how this relates to their teaching practices.

Selection Criteria.

Teachers were selected as participants through a two-step "insiders' point of view" (Adkins-Coleman, 2010, p. 42) nomination process. Adkins-Coleman (2010) described this approach and its precedence:

> Similar to Foster (1991), and later Ladson-Billings (1994), the researcher in this study sought an insiders' point-of-view as part of the selection process by using a variation of Foster's "community nomination" process. Foster generated a list of participants from various community resources, such as Black newspapers and churches, and Ladson-Billings selected participants from a list of names generated by parents (or "the primary consumers") of Black elementary students. Because this study centered on teachers of secondary students, students were treated as the primary consumers and were asked to identify effective teachers. The list of teachers was cross-referenced with a list generated by principals who used evidence to identify English teachers who successfully facilitated

> achievement among Black students. The two teachers who received the highest percentage of student nominations and received nominations from the principals were invited to participate in the study." (p. 42)

Also, since my focus was on secondary teachers I recognized that older students are able to consider a teacher's "successes" and requested nominations from students. During their lunch period, I asked students to consider 1. which teachers they like and 2. whose class they feel supported, affirmed, and respected in. These criteria allowed students flexibility to use their own conceptualizations of teachers' "success" while also working to minimize deficit manifestations of "community" in the classroom. I also asked that the principal, assistant principals, and academic dean, which teachers fostered student achievement and engagement. This was based on testing measures, their personal observations, and reports they had from secondary sources. Finally, I asked the parent specialist and Family Resource Center director which teachers they felt strongly supported students and their families. These nomination lists were cross-examined and teachers receiving the highest number of nominations on both lists were invited to participate.

Research Methods

This study employed several methods for data collection. Between February 2016 and July 2016 I used semi-structured interviews, semi-structured observations, document interrogation or artifact analysis (all described by Thomas (2011)), photography (Hall, 2009; Rose, 2008), and mapping methods to collect data.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews served as a more direct method. I conducted four audio-recorded interviews with each participant. The lengths of the interviews varied from one hour and fifteen minutes to two hours and fifty minutes. In all I collected around seven hours of interview data for each participant.

Interview 1. The first interview was introductory and informal, allowing an opportunity for me to introduce myself and learn some basic information about the teacher participants (see appendix B for interview 1 protocol). This took place on HMS's campus after students had been dismissed. Though potentially seeming inefficient, the primary goal was to establish and begin building relationship and trust and, secondarily, gather demographic and background information about the participants.

Interview 2. In the second interview I focused my questions around my first research question (see appendix B for interview 2 protocol). This interview was conducted in a place of the participant's choosing, with the stipulation that it be near, but outside of, the school. The purpose conducting the interview outside of the school building was to distance thinking within the context of the classroom, to an extent, and support participants' thinking and responses in relation to their students' communities. While I recognize that this privileged geographic-based notions of "community," I also believe that changing the environment within which the interview took place supported more complex thinking and responses. This location variation is supported by CHG, which understands space, context, and location as imbued with power, affecting us ideologically and epistemologically. Location, then, is important.

Interview 3. I conducted a third interview within the participant's classroom after students had been dismissed for the day. This interview focused primarily on my second research question (see appendix B for interview 3 protocol). Again, I considered location, wanting the interview to take place within the school this time, but also in a place of familiarity and comfort. I began the interview by reviewing responses from the previous interview, allowing participants a chance to reconsider their understandings of community within a different space (i.e. the classroom) before moving to new questions in line with my second research question.

Interview 4. The final, fourth, interview differed from the others. The location was again within the participants' respective classrooms, but the conversation was centered on examining and discussing photography they had taken and mapping this photography as well as constructing final, geographic representations of their own and their students' communities (see appendix B for interview 4 protocol). Centering my second research question, I asked teachers to bring in photographs they had taken to document their students' communities. During the interview we discussed the photographs. I asked the participants to describe their rationale for taking the particular pictures they did. After discussing the photography, I asked each participant to map out the approximate locations where each photograph was taken, or the location(s) the participant felt the photograph represented before defining, as possible, what she felt represented the students' communities and her own communities. I provided maps of varying scale from which they could choose which worked best for this purpose. This interview offered new ways for the participants to convey their understandings of

"community," but it also brought up previous responses for reflection. Photography and mapping, as methods, will be discussed further in the following section.

Participant-produced photography. Prior to the fourth interview, I asked participants to take photographs that they felt showed and represented their students' communities (see instructions in appendix C). Taking inspiration from Rose (2008) and Hall (2009), I consider photography to be a "discrete research method in itself" (Hall, 2009, p. 454). Through a CHG perspective, I approached photography not as an objective documentation of reality, but as a socially-constructed *representation* (Rose, 2008). Viewed in this way, the photography told more of the "person and context that produced it than it does the contents that it depicts" (Hall, 2009, p. 454). Since my interest lies in how teachers understand their students' communities, I asked participants to photograph what *they* felt represented this concept. I did so without concern about the actual image, but rather what the image said of the participants' understandings.

Rose (2008) offered some important considerations for using photography as a research method. She asserted that a researcher-participant relationship needs to be established for this method to be most useful. For this reason, I asked participants to take the photography after the third interview had been completed. This provided time for researcher-participant relationships to be developed. Rose also noted that clear instructions need to be in place. Toward this end I presented participants with written photography instructions after the third observation.

Semi-structured observations. I also used the method of semi-structured observations for data collection. This method supported, expanded, and triangulated the

interviews. After the third interview I conducted 10 observations of each participant to support the interviews and consider how their understandings played out in the classroom. I also made comparisons between the observations and interviews to find ways "community" was present in the classroom but not discussed within the interviews. This attention to building upon the interviews rather than merely confirming them addressed a concern around fieldwork within studies that use a CHG framing. According to Hope (2009), fieldwork is important, but can be problematic if it merely reinforces preconceived notions.

Though I did not intend to be involved in any of the activities, my participation was requested in a couple of instances (e.g. helping to get a projector to show a video). In most cases, however, I simply "watch[ed] for particular kinds of behaviours" (Thomas, 2011) that the teachers engaged in and were connected with notions of "community." During my observations of each teacher, I took field notes. Again, my interviews (and primarily the third) will help to give some direction to these observations, but they will also remain open

Mapping. In support of the participant-taken photography, I asked participants to geographically represent their photographs and process by locating areas they took pictures on maps. I offered the participants maps ranging from a national (and slightly beyond) scale down to a neighborhood scale and allowed them to choose which maps were most useful for this. After they represented their photography on the map(s), I then asked participants if they felt they could construct a boundary to show, roughly, areas that were a part of their students' communities. Finally, I asked each participant to locate her

area of residence on the map and then locate areas she felt to be included or involved with her own community. This offered opportunity for participants' to further clarify their understandings of community.

Document analysis. In addition to the other methods, I also requested to see non-confidential documents in which the teacher had written instructions or guides to her students or reports to her students' parents. This included classroom participation and expectation documents directed to students, letters for parents, and a website directed primarily to students.

Each of the methods described here provided different "angles" (Thomas, 2011) to inform my research questions. Beyond the ability to triangulate data though, the photography, observations, mapping, and documents also presented some alternative answers to my research questions that were not fully interrogated through the interviews.

Data Analysis

Once all of my data was collected, I began the analyzation process. In doing so I used my conceptual framework as a tool for making sense of the data. From this foundation, I then developed themes from the data.

Conceptual framework as analytical tool. My conceptual framework, consisting of critical and postmodern theoretical perspectives, served as a lens through which to consider and organize the data in order to develop themes. Focusing specifically on the notion of "community," critical and postmodern perspectives each offered a way to look at the data.

Critical theory, as described previously, is concerned with asymmetrical allocations of power. Applied to the concept of "community," it can be understood that some communities hold more power and others less. CRP specifically recognizes power as existing in relation to social, racial, and cultural statuses. CHG understands power in broader terms, as existing between center and periphery groups. It was important, then, to consider how power was present and implicit in teachers' understandings of communities, including their students' communities. One way I did this was through a consideration of deficit versus anti-deficit thinking.

Adding a postmodern theoretical perspective increased the complexity of considering teachers' understandings and uses of "community." Destabilizing fixed notions, a postmodern lens allowed me to question single definitions and consider how teachers held multiple, even conflicting, understandings around the concept of "community." More than that, CHG positioned the teachers' understandings and practices as speaking to and informing one another with a fluidity that allowed for negotiation and shifting of meaning. I saw this across time as the study progressed. Combing this perspective with a critical one, then, allowed me to consider ways that "community" simultaneously existed in deficit and anti-deficit ways; how "community" simultaneously existed as spaces of oppression and spaces of resistance; how one community holding limited power overlapped with another community imbued with power.

This critical, postmodern conceptual framework was my foundation for approaching and interpreting the data from this study; it informed my initial thematic

starting points. Through a combined CRP and CHG perspective I examined the data asking the following questions:

- At what scalar level(s) does "community" exist? (i.e. loosely labeled as 1. single home/family, 2. Apartment complex/neighborhood, 3. student groups within HMS 4. HMS/all students 5. HMS attendance zone/local, 6. city/local organizations, 7. city and suburbs/multiple closely-located cities, 8. state, 9. nation/national organizations, 10. global)
- Are there any acknowledgements of power existing within or around "community" within the data?
    - Is this seen as oppression (i.e. O), marginalized status (i.e. M), or resisting (i.e. R)?
    - At what scalar level(s) does this power exist?
- Is "community" understood in deficit (i.e. D) or non-deficit (N-D) ways?
    - Is there a distinction between how "community" is constructed when addressed in more general ways versus how it is constructed in relation to students?
    - Is there a distinction between how "community" is constructed across scalar levels?
- Within each case, is there conflict or fluidity?
    - Between understandings of "community?"
    - Between understandings of "community" and how "community" exists in teaching practice?

These broad questions served as a starting point, helping me form ideas and themes from the data, but they were incomplete. As these questions become inadequate, I allowed the data to lead me in developing new themes and sub-themes.

Methods for data analysis. As a part of my data analysis, I used interpretive inquiry or constant comparative method (Thomas, 2011). My analysis process was based around the development of themes (initially guided by questions based on my conceptual framework) through continuous reflection, re-reading and re-reviewing of the data again and again: "comparing each element – phrase, sentence or paragraph – with all of the other elements" (Thomas, 2011, p. 171). There were two main steps in this analytic re-reading process. In stage one, I used my conceptual framework and questions described to code and make meaning of the data. From this I generated a set of initial, emergent themes. During stage two, I re-reviewed the data, looking for relevant, emergent themes that exist outside of the conceptual framework guiding the study. This stage helped confirm, disconfirm, or further the first set of themes identified. Within each of these two stages, I engaged in multiple readings and re-readings of the data.

My reflections and comparisons began within each case and each particular instance of data collection (e.g. interview 1), but then expanded as I reflected across multiple instances of data collection—within a particular case (i.e. one teacher)—and, finally, across the cases. Documenting emerging themes as they evolved was important and I used initial coding and note taking (developed as the study and my reflecting progressed) that was based on my conceptual framing. I kept a journal in which I stored memos to myself.

Procedurally, I approached my data in some specific ways. For the interviews, I transcribed each one, reflected on each interview individually, and then compare the interviews with each other (first within a case, then across cases) in order to consider the data within the two stages I described. Upon completing each semi-structured observation I reviewed my field notes and expand upon them. Once this was completed I added additional notes about any significant ways the notion of "community" manifested within the participants' teaching. As observations continued, I also began adding reflective notes and then worked to identify themes through the two-staged process described previously. For my document interrogation, I also employed this process to consider themes around "community" within individual documents and then across the documents. Because discussion of photography and mapping took place within an interview setting, I used the interview reflection and analysis procedures already described. However, I also considered groupings for the photographs: Did they focus on people? Or places? Or cultural aspects? Or perhaps more affective elements? I also considered how the mapping (of the images) corresponded with the geographic location of the school and attendance zone and considered questions around scale: At what level(s) were the students' communities defined? At what level(s) did the teachers define themselves? Did these scalar levels correspond with each other? As with my analysis of the other data, I used my conceptual framework to reflect on the photographers' (i.e. participants') viewpoints, what meaning they made, and what they found significant. As Hall (2009) wrote, "attempt to read the intentions of the producers of the images" (p. 457). Throughout all of

these steps, identifying information was made anonymous through the use of pseudonyms wherever appropriate.

I felt this repetitious process was complete once themes emerged that I felt captured the essence of all the data. While this reflected my conceptual framework, it went beyond my initial thematic-based questions. The transcription software, Dragon, and the qualitative software, ATLAS.ti, was used in this analysis process.

Trustworthiness

There were several ways trustworthiness was established. First, credibility was established through the various ways I engaged participants with the research questions: interviews, participant-taken photography, observations, mapping, and document interrogation. In addition to this triangulation, member checks were also utilized, allowing participants an opportunity to confirm that I had adequately and accurately recorded their responses. Finally, I used peer checks to confirm I was adequately thinking through the data.

Supporting transferability I provide details about the research and use thick description (Geertz, 1973). Towards this goal, I also worked to provide detailed descriptions of the site and context (primarily done in chapter four). I also built on this by offering quotes from the interviews that allow the participants' voices (Merriam, 2001) to come through.

Finally, in an effort to increase conformability I used triangulation and strived to be transparent in my methods. As already described, I used multiple methods and settings to confirm participant responses and understandings. I also used two theoretical

frameworks to support a data interpretation process that was expansive, considering multiple perspectives. Throughout this chapter, I have laid out each step that I took in my data collection process. Collectively, then, trustworthiness is established.

Positionality

My interest in this research project has come through both personal commitment and academic inquiry. I have attended a church that lies within the school's zoning lines for the past 20 years. For nearly 15 years, I have supported, organized, and led community-focused youth programs (i.e. programs to support local residents rather than solely those attending the church's worship services). As my interest in the notion of "community" grew I began becoming involved with the middle school that served as my research site. I did this through some tutoring and attendance of the Family Resource Center's monthly community partnerships meetings, representing partnership with my church and providing connection to the social services we offered. Through my participation with this local area, what I consider to be my community, I have gotten to know and build relationships with many families living within the school's attendance zone and have developed a strong affinity for the area.

In addition to addressing my interest in this work, I also want to highlight issues of positionality, power, and representation as described by Merriam (2002). Merriam stated that, "Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'" (p. 411). Since my cases are teachers, it was important to consider myself in relation to them. Banks (1998) described four positionality statuses that are useful for considering this relationship: indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider,

and external-outsider. From his criteria of an indigenous person being of the group studied, versus an external being of a different group than that which is studied, I was mostly external. While I have been a middle school teacher, I taught at a middle- to upper-income, predominately White, private school. Though my experience as an educator certainly allowed for some alignment with my teacher participants, I feel this also presented some difference between us.

The second half of the status is insider or outsider. As just mentioned, a former middle-school teacher myself, and as someone who holds a longstanding connection to and investment in the area and with the area's residents, I was an external-insider. This is one who is viewed as an "adopted" insider (Banks, 1998, p. 8).

In terms of Merriam's second issue of power, I understand that as a researcher I held a position of power in relation to the participants. This could not be helped. However, I actively worked to empower participants to freely express themselves through building researcher-participant relationships and using multiple data collection methods. Other aspects, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and culture did not contribute to my status of power, however. Though I am culturally- and racially- mixed, having a White mother and Mexican-American father, I identify as a bi-racial Latina who is light-skinned. Again, these are factors could be avoided, but I recognize them as influential in how I approached this research and how I was perceived and received as a researcher.

SUMMARY

Here I have offered insight into my methodology and methods guided by my conceptual framework. Through this accounting I have worked to establish the validity and integrity of this work. In the following four chapters I share findings from my data, providing contextualization in chapter four and then devoting a chapter to each participant in chapters five through seven. I then discuss my findings and offer implications in the final chapter.

Chapter 4: Placing: Overview of city, school, and teachers

In this chapter I present an overview of the geography that holds particular significance for this study as well as a general sketch of the teacher participants of this study. Both of these contribute insight and clarity for chapters five through seven, which present detailed accountings of the teachers and her understandings and teaching practices around the notion of "community."

THE PLACES

Here I describe places significant to this study. I begin by presenting an overview of a few significant events in Austin's history since it is the city in which HMS is located. I then note developments within Austin's public education to further situate and contextualize the middle school and teachers of this study. Finally, I describe contemporary Austin with particular focus on the area surrounding the school and the school itself, connecting this to the histories.

This is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather, a presentation of some salient features of the places and spaces to which the teachers who are participating in this study are connected. Aspects of this contextualization came up during my time with the teachers and thus this section holds both conceptual and practical necessity.

Austin's Beginnings

Attractive for its large water source, the Colorado River, the Austin area immediately drew in White settlers following the Texas Revolution and by 1839, the area had already been chosen to serve as the capital for the new Republic of Texas. By 1840, the town's population had already grown to 856 people (Kearl, n.d.), a foreshadowing of the rapid growth to come.

One distinguishing characteristic of Austin some have identified is its population diversity. Kearl (n.d.) stated, "diverse cultural groups have been attracted to Austin throughout its history, including immigrants from Europe, Africa, Mexico, and most recently, Asia" (Para 8). Though U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) data showed a Black population in Austin of only 1 in 1850, by the 1860 census the population had increased to just under a thousand and made up 28.3 percent of the population (nearly all enslaved). After news of the Emancipation Proclamation reached Texas (two years after being enacted) the Black population had reached its peak percentage in Austin at 36.5 percent of inhabitants, according to the 1870 census. Black population continued to make up a quarter or more of the city's population until it dropped to 19.8 percent in 1920 and made a gradual decline over the following decades. Population data for "Mexican" residents held a one-time appearance in 1930 until the "Hispanic Origin" classification was added in 1970. In 1930 the Latina/o population in Austin was recorded as a part of the "other race" category and made up 9.4 percent, though this was almost certainly flawed due to differing questionnaires and collection methods (Cohn, 2010). Beginning in 1970, data revealed a growing population percentage of 18.8 percent—a number that would increase

over coming decades. However, despite this racial diversity, a history of persistent racial segregation tempered potential for cultural sharing and richness.

Throughout the de jure segregation era and through the current de facto era, various systems have been instrumental in fostering racial segregation within Austin. Austin city planning has been one such system. Though Black (and Latina/o—a group whose population grew in the latter half of the twentieth century) Austin residents had lived throughout the city in the late 1800s through the early 1900s, the creation of a "Negro District" in 1928 ushered in a significant residential shift. Through the Koch and Fowler city plan, Black families were pushed to East Austin—the sole area designated for them to access schools, facilities, and other public services. This area was also given the city's weakest (industrial) zoning restrictions (Zehr, 2015), including private residences and consequently prevented homeowners from obtaining home improvement loans. Additionally, in 1957, the official Austin Development Plan recommended all industrial development be located in East Austin (Rivera & Rivera, 2012). Despite this, Rivera and Rivera (2012) highlighted that Rosewood (a Black neighborhood area resulting from the city planning) boasted a "vibrant African American business community" (p. 8) that included restaurants, barber and beauty shops, and clubs that featured live music from local and nationally-recognized entertainers.

In support of this segregationist city planning, infrastructure and federal policy have also served to create firm, physical borders and spaces. East Avenue paving began in 1933. In 1950 development continued as it was widened and an overpass was added. By 1957 East Avenue had become Interstate Highway 35 and "effectively divided East

and West Austin" (Rivera & Rivera, 2012, p. 8), further separating Black and Latina/o residents to East Austin. Layered upon segregation-supporting city planning and infrastructure was federal policy. Zehr (2015) remarked on how the New Deal program, launched in 1935, further reinforced boundaries and segregation in Austin through practice of "redlining." He wrote that, "in Austin, the largest redlined section encompassed Koch and Fowler's 'negro district'" (para 6) and that, "because the Home Owners Loan Corporation would not provide mortgages in those districts, most of the nation's African-American residents could not access one of the most significant efforts to buld [sic] household wealth in U.S. history" (para 7). Shortly after the New Deal, the federal 1937 Slum Clearance Housing Project Act allowed Austin to set a national precedence as it was the first city to build residential projects under the act: Santa Rita for Mexican Americans, Chalmers for White residents, and Rosewood for Black residents. Then in 1956, the city used federal money to fund urban renewal, "with the intent to 'clear slums and eliminate urban blight'" (Rivera & Rivera, 2012, p. 109). Lasting over 15 years, according to Rivera and Rivera (2012), this "urban renewal" led to increased property taxes and marked the beginning of gentrification efforts to come.

Resulting from these systems, Rivera and Rivera (2012) declared that, "the US Census of 1970 recorded that Austin was more segregated than at any other time in its history" (p. 8). Despite these racially antagonizing, segregationist practices, Austin's population has increased every year with the sole exception of 1900 (holding a negative 0.02 percent growth rate).

Supporting Austin's rapid growth has been its development as a technology industry. While studying at The University of Texas at Austin, Michael Dell founded PC's Limited in 1984 and then located his company's headquarters in North Austin before relocating it to a city in the northern part of the Austin metro area a decade later in 1996 (NRP, 2000). In that same year Samsung also built a facility. Apple started in Austin in 1992 and then went on to construct a 38-acre campus in Northwest Austin (Hawkins & Eaton, 2016; Hawkins & Novak, 2015). In line with this industry's demands, 2000 census data showed that Austin's median age was around 30 (Area Connect, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and the census also found that family households with children under 18 make up only about 27 percent.

In all, Austin has been recognized for its ecological hospitality, rapid growth and expansion, high-tech industry, and diverse cultural heritage tempered by a legacy of racial tension and injustice.

K-12 public education developments. Local writer, Chang (2015) described an initial resistance to public education saying, "Early Austinites thought that public schools were a charity and opposed government intrusion" (para 1). Perhaps because of this, it wasn't until September of 1881 that the Austin City Public Schools admitted their first classes. In the years prior, Black Austin residents had already been establishing their own public schools and by 1880 there were five schools for Black children. Over the century that followed, the city's educational system decisions and developments paralleled the city developments already described.

In line with the Jim Crow "separate but equal" system, the Texas Constitution included a mandate for separate White and Black schooling facilities in 1876. White, Black, and Mexican schools were maintained throughout this time. By 1900 Austin Public Schools owned seven schools for White children, four schools for Black children, and rented two more, one for Black children and one for Mexican children (Chang, 2015). Preceding the federal 1937 Slum Clearance Housing Project Act, Zavala Elementary was opened in 1936 as a "'Mexican school,' built to get the Spanish-speaking kids out of Metz" (Whittaker, 2014, para 5). This school, along with the Santa Rita housing project built next to it a few years later served to secure a concentrated population of Mexican Americans in this east Austin area. Similarly the construction of the Black housing project, Rosewood, was located next to L. C. Anderson High School, a Black public school in 1889. Both schools served as significant cultural and social cornerstones for Black and Mexican-American Austin residents.

The fifties brought on the beginning of changes. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) was established as its own taxing entity in 1955, just a year after the US Supreme Court held that separate is not equal through the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. As Wilson and Segal (2001) described, Texas, led by state political leaders and the city of Austin's example, chose to interpret the concept of "with all deliberate speed," to mean "with all deliberate slowness" (p. 46). The authors wrote, that through a "policy of tokenism" (p. 38), Austin educational administrators used such techniques as a "cross-over teachers plan" and "freedom of choice" (p. 37) plan for high

school students that amounted to little more than a few Black teachers being moved to Mexican American schools and a few Black students attending White schools.

It wasn't until 1963 that "freedom of choice was extended to grades one through four" (Wilson & Segal, 2001, p. 54) and not until 1971 that the Austin Independent School District, ostensibly, desegregated. Desegregation meant, however, that L. C. Anderson High School and Kealing Junior High School—the only Black secondary schools in Austin—were closed and Black students were bused into West Austin to attend formerly White schools. Then in 1979 a plan was approved that would provide new schools in East Austin and maintain bilingual programs and affirmative action in hiring staff. It would also include bussing of both White *and* Black students. The stipulation of this Consent Order was that, if fully implemented, AISD would be declared a "unitary" system free from further federal intervention (Cuban, 2008).

After three years, AISD filed to become a unitary district and in 1986, and it was granted. This marked a profound shift in Austin's desegregation history as bussing ended and the district returned to a neighborhood-school attendance practice. Cuban (2008) wrote, "with the formal end of court-ordered desegregation … residential segregation now produced a giant spike in the number of minority and poor-dominated schools" (p. 30). He further summarized that, "after 32 years of 'freedom of choice,' 'cross-over teachers,' court battles, anti-busing rallies, and street confrontations …. [the] reduction of segregated schools, however, reversed itself in the years after 1986" (p. 30).

Though de facto segregation reversed much of the desegregation efforts, Cuban (2008) described how an informal structure of parental choice emerged from the era. This

included magnet schools, International Baccalaureate programs, career academies, and then, more recently, in 1995, Senate Bill 1 handed over authority to the State Board of Education to grant open-enrollment charter schools. The charter movement grew quickly and today the Texas Education Agency (TEA; n.d.a) reports about 185 operating charter schools in Texas with 50 of those being located within Austin and even more in the larger Austin metropolitan areas.

Contemporary Austin

Today, as Austin encroaches upon it's second century birthday, the city is on the cusp of boasting a million in resident population. However, as Austin has grown and fused into surrounding suburbs, this population is not entirely representative of the city. The population of the five-county Austin metropolitan area is said to have recently grown past the two million mark (Egan, 2015). Despite its size (ranked 11th largest city in the U.S.), political influence, and national—even international—recognition (e.g. known as "the Live Music Capital of the World"), Austin cannot be disjointed from its past as CHG recognizes space as (re)produced out of historical instances. Past and current city conditions, then, provide relevant spatial and social contextualization for Hunter Middle School and the teachers in this study.

Austin's city demographer, Ryan Robinson (2016), identified ten top trends in Austin's population. As Austin is urbanizing, he found ethnic change and diversification to be a common theme throughout. The trends are: 1. no majority, 2. a decreasing families-with-children share in the urban core, 3. an African American share on the wane, 4. a growing Hispanic share of total population, 5. an Asian share skyrocketing, 6. the

geography of African Americans being dispersed with flight to the suburbs, 7. the geography of Hispanics intensifying urban barrios along with movement into rural areas, 8. an increasingly sharp edge of affluence, 9. a growing regional indigent health care burden, and 10. an intensifying urban sprawl. Throughout the rest of this section I will draw on this list and connect these trends with historical understandings and with Hunter Middle School, particularly speaking to their impact and influence on the school. As the school lays on the edge of City of Austin Council Districts 4 and 7 and its attendance zone includes parts of both districts (see figure 4.1), I will primarily focus on these areas.

In his first trend, Robinson's (2016) reported that Austin is becoming a "Majority-Minority city," stating that "the City's Anglo (non-Hispanic White) share of total population has dropped below 50% (which probably occurred sometime during 2005)" (para 3). He indicated that this is not due to a lack of growth of White households, but rather connects to the fourth and fifth demographic trends he found: Latina/o and Asian households are growing at a faster rate. Though historically the Latina/o population has been observed as increasing, Asian population growth has been more recent, nearly doubling in the 1990s and continuing to increase thereafter. According to Robinson, India, Vietnam, and China have been the largest contributors. Vietnamese households have largely clustered in several northeast Austin neighborhoods, opening new businesses and purchasing restaurants. This "minority" growth corresponded with the Immigration Act of 1990, which increased the annual visa cap significantly, as well as the growth of Austin's tech industry and opening of jobs. Perhaps even Austin's shifting toward a majority-minority city itself, served to create a more hospitable-seeming

location for non-dominant groups. Finally, though not contributing a significant percentage to the overall population of Austin, the establishment of a Refugee Services of Texas office in 2003 within District 4, just three miles from HMS, has certainly contributed to the overall diversity of the area (Refugee Services of Texas, n.d.).

In reporting on his second, third, sixth, and seventh trends, Robinson (2016) brought attention to the migration of various populations. He noted the decline of families-with-children within the urban core and Black families across the city. He found Black families moving to suburbs and Latina/o families moving to more rural areas and creating urban barrios within three area: lower East Austin (affected by historical developments mentioned in the previous section), greater Dove Springs, and the St. Johns area (within District 4). There must certainly be multiple influential factors affecting this, but one may lie in the steep rises in real estate costs. The Austin Board of REALTORS® (2016) reported the City of Austin median price of homes to be over $350,000, the result of a 10.3 percent year-over-year increase. Across the Austin-Round Rock metro area, the median home price was estimated at just under $300,000. Connected to the soaring real estate prices, are rental costs. One apartment search site estimates the lowest price available to be over $1,000 with a general requirement of rent being only a third of your income (Apartments Express, n.d.). Within the area surrounding HMS, however, it is not uncommon for the lowest-priced apartments to require that tenants make four times the cost of rent (R. Banda, personal communication, October 18, 2016). Gentrification and re-segregating schools may have also impacted these population movements. Robinson (2016) stated that, “the critical mass and historical heavy concentration of African

American households in east Austin began eroding during the 1980s, and by the mid-1990s, had really begun to break apart" (para 18), and that middle-class households, particularly, moved to Austin suburbs. As discussed, this timeline corresponds with AISD's return to neighborhood-school attendance and would find East Austin three decades into urban "renewal" efforts, resulting in heavily increased property taxes. This might help to explain the intensifying of Latina/o barrios and movement to rural areas.

Connected to all of this has been the development of an increasingly sharp edge of affluence (the eighth trend) in Austin. Robinson (2016) wrote that, "over the past few decades, the degree of socio-economic spatial separation has steeply increased. The center of wealth in Austin has slowly migrated into the hills west of the city" (para 22). This follows the pattern established in the first half of the twentieth century with the East Austin "Negro District" development, shadowed by the paving of Interstate Highway 35 and other neighborhood development and zoning already described previously. This separation has led to an even more divided city in terms of income, cultural attributes, linguistic characteristic, and political persuasion (with Republican and Democrat identification respectively following a West and East division roughly following MoPac, Austin's second major highway), according to Robinson. The afore-mentioned migration of middle-class families out of Austin has almost certainly supported this trend.

In all, Robinson (2016) noted a sort of self-perpetuating kind of cycle in which trends of a deepening socio-economic disparity and a decreasing families-with-children share lead to "an even greater burden for citizens funding services and facilities" (para 23), including school systems (predominately felt by AISD) and health care providers

(the ninth trend). His report also helps to explain Austin's intensifying urban sprawl (the tenth trend) and persistent wealth and racial segregation.

Hunter Middle School. Situated in north-central Austin, Hunter Middle School has been shaped out of historical to contemporary spaces, groups, efforts, and events I have reported (though this is only a partial accounting). In this section I focus more closely on the spaces directly surrounding the school in order to give a clearer picture of the context in which the teachers, who participated in this study, work.

As already noted, HMS's attendance zone lies across parts of Austin's Districts 4 and 7. Despite the school being located in District 7, much of the attendance zone is located within District 4 (see figure 4.1), and attendance from District 7 is limited as the attendance area immediately west of the school is occupied by businesses. This is noteworthy because the current demographic differences between 4 and 7 are substantial. According to census data from 2010, District 4 has a rapidly increasing, predominately Latina/o population while, while District 7 is made up of a White population primarily. District 4 has a higher Black population compared to District 7 that holds a greater Asian population percentage. Another important difference is income. The median family income estimated for District 4 is $39,200 while the same estimate for District 7 is $74,250. While a median income nearly double that of its neighbors is telling enough, it is likely that this gap may be even larger given the high Latina/o population present within District 4 and the hesitation of undocumented families to participate in any kind of reporting. All of this serves to highlight the clashing spaces in which HMS finds itself.

With the two districts forming a sort of west-east boundary, connections can be draw to the historical west-east divide experienced by the city at large. To the school's west, there are largely affluent developments, while the east experiences "renewal" efforts. In the space between the school and the second major north-south highway to its west (largely District 7), this affluence includes high-end businesses (e.g. car lots selling and servicing luxury cars, expensive furniture stores, and entertainment and food venues) and a large, high-density, upscale, residential, shopping, and entertainment conglomerate, likened in some ways to a second downtown which was recently developed within the past decade. To the east of the school, District 4 was included in a three-year, grant-funded (by the Department of Justice) restoration project that expired in the fall of 2016 (City of Austin, n.d.). Additionally, in 2015 the Austin City Council approved half a million dollars to be used to construct a new park in North Austin. The rationale given for this was that the district had, "the highest number of apartment dwellers and the highest percentage of children without health insurance in the city" (Nuzback, 2015, para 1).

In Robinson's (2016) report, he suggested that Austin's public schools face struggles as the overall number of students attending the city's public schools is on the decline and yet more student and family support and assistance is needed as families find themselves at the bottom of a widening income gap and steeply rising cost of living. HMS, toward addressing this, has secured support to maintain three student and family support programs: Family Resource Center, After School Meals, and Community in Schools. This has connected families with food, clothing, and other services, including language support, as over 20 different languages are spoken by HMS students and their

families. Another relevant characteristic of HMS is the consistently declining Black student population. From the 2012-2013 to the 2014-2015 school years, the percentage of Black students has dropped from 11.8 to eight and a half percent. Moreover, the population percentage had been decreasing over the years prior to this (TEA, n.d.b). Conversely, the Latina/o population percentage increased from 80.3 to 83.6 percent over the same three years. Despite increasing wealth, expensive housing development, and a high number of White families within District 7, the percentage of White students at HMS remained steady at around four percent. Perhaps influencing this was the presence of several charter and magnet schools in the area.

In this next half of the chapter I offer a short overview of each teacher's background, identity, experiences, and commitments, aspects that have almost certainly shaped each one's understandings and teaching practices (discussed in chapters five through seven).

THE TEACHERS

In this section I describe each teacher briefly. Prior to this study I had never met any of these teachers, nor did I have any connection with them other than our mutual connection of the school. For this reason I include my own initial impression of each teacher before moving to how the teacher, herself, identified. In addition to identity-related information, I also offer details about each participant's status as a teacher, both past and present (e.g. training, years taught, subject currently teaching), reasons she chose

the profession and how she came to be at Hunter Middle School, and spatial information (i.e. residence and classroom location). All of this is important because, just as I attempted to contextualize placement of the school through the first half of this chapter, these glimpses into who each teacher is provide a foundation and enrichment for understanding their approaches to the concept of "community," which will be described in the next chapters. Additionally, since this research is subjective to my own positionality, the descriptions offered here should help clarify how I came to the findings and conclusions I did.

A final note is that each teacher has been assigned a pseudonym (Ms. Corazón and Mrs. García chose their own, and I chose Mrs. Taylor's at her request) and I have excluded personally identifying information. Because I feel that the participants' residence information is necessary for a full accounting and faithful use of my conceptual framing, I have included it. However, for anonymity purposes I do not include a specific address, but rather a generic placement that still contributes to spatial understanding.

Ms. Corazón

In the first moments of my first meeting with Ms. Corazón, I quickly noted her vivacious personality. She was quick to agree to participate with my study and eager to help me in any way she could. I was excited to have her participation, not only because she was the first teacher I got a response from, but also because her enthusiastic, warm mannerisms made me feel at ease and as if we had already been friends for some time.

A seventh grade math teacher at Hunter Middle School, Ms. Corazón identified as a career-teacher. She explained that teaching was all she had done, all she knew. Now in her early 40s she reflected upon the fact that she had taught for more half her life, 23 years. She further described herself as a Latina and recognized the significance of that identity in supporting her students' academic success, as they were able to see someone with whom they could identify. She also noted that her Catholic background, though not her current practice, and her fluency in Spanish supported her ability to connect with her students. She found students often "schooled" her on current trends (e.g. Twitter no longer being cool), helping her to feel younger and culturally knowledgeable. Though she found similarities between herself and her students, Ms. Corazón stated that she was open- and equity-minded, accepting, and supporting of all her students' identities, whether they matched her own or not. Finally, she situated herself at present as belonging to lower-middle socioeconomic class, recognizing that her status afforded her many privileges and feeling a responsibility to share this with her students.

Recognizing currently held privileges, Ms. Corazón also recounted growing up without. Born in West Texas, she stated her family was poor and had little formal education. Her mom had dropped out after eighth grade and her dad never continued education after high school. Holding both a bachelor's and master's degree, Ms. Corazón was the first to gain a college degree on her father's side and the first female on her mother's side. During her undergraduate education she had intended to get her degree in engineering, but found out during her first year that she was going to be a mom and became concerned about the high demands of the major, so she sought advising for a

change. Having volunteered with GED students and helped in Sunday school, she and her advisor thought she would find a fit with in education. Ms. Corazón remembered how she planned go back and finish her Engineering degree after a few years, but fell in love with teaching. She described how she discovered similarities between teaching and engineering through opportunities to problem solve:

> I'd go to my principal and I'd say, 'you know I've noticed this issue or concern and here's my idea of how to ameliorate that.' … [and] I found that I was really encouraged. So that part of engineering, that being creative and creating systems and looking at things logically and systematically played well into being a teacher. So my strengths were still utilized and I just found that this was a calling. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016)

Ms. Corazón's undergraduate training was focused on math and language arts content areas and she recently finished a Master's principalship program at a local, highly ranked university, though she explained that she was not necessarily ready to leave the classroom. During her 23 years as a teacher, she had taught at public schools in West Texas and the greater Austin metropolitan area prior to joining AISD. Listening to news stories describe student underperformance and potential school closures in East Austin, Ms. Corazón felt a draw to work in those schools, even taking a significant pay cut to do so. As she told me about this journey she good-heartedly chuckled that she had moved to East Austin, excited to get a job there and wanting to live next to the school and be a part of the community, only to have the school close the year after she started. She then took a position at another, similar East Austin middle school nearby, but that school went through a reconstruction and she was transferred to Hunter Middle School the next year.

At the time of my interviewing her, Ms. Corazón was in her first year at HMS and was teaching 7th grade math. Though she had not purposed to teach at HMS, she remarked that the demographics were largely similar to East Austin schools and that she was not only glad to be there, but also planned to set roots there remarking, "I love it here…. I'll stay here till I retire. If I could. And hopefully in different capacities. You know, maybe I can be an AP or something, but if not, I'll just stay teaching" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016). Though currently living in southeast Austin (see figure 4.2) for the reasons just described, Ms. Corazón commented that she would like to eventually move to North Austin, if possible, to be close to the school and be able to ride the buses, meeting up with her students and their families on weekends as she did when working at East Austin schools. She lamented,

> I literally moved to [southeast Austin] because I worked at [East Austin schools]…. And I wanted to live in the community where I taught…. So I was part of the community there. So when I transferred here I kinda couldn't just move. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016).

In all she stated that she had lived in the Austin metro area for 18 years, including far north, northwest, and southeast areas.

In all, Ms. Corazón described herself as a motherly teacher who was fair, strict, and nice. She stated, "I care about my kids. I claim my kids. I am the other mother for these kids" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016). She further explained that she was like the embarrassing mom, yelling and cheering loudly while wearing school colors at her students' sporting events. Supporting her motherly role, she

also described her consistency with boundaries and consequences in the classroom. This was all part of a balance, however, as she clarified,

> I have to not just discipline them and have strict standards for them, I have to love them and care about them as people. And I need to also notice the nuances, like when they're coming in and they're not themselves…. Kids tell me a lot of things. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016)

According to past students whom she had run into at various times, she said they described her as patient. She felt parents would say she was respectful and caring, attentive to students' needs and quick to communicate with them through positive reports and with concerns.

When questioned about what kind of impact she felt she had as a teacher, Ms. Corazón described her personal commitment and belief that she and others are to make the world a better place. She expounded that, when a teacher does his or her job well, a community is strengthened and a stronger nation is built. In closing, I will let her own words further reveal her conviction:

> I think that I'm a mover and a shaker. I'm staying with it and I'm not giving up on public school and I'm helping our kids to see their place in the world. And you know, I love Austin and I know we've gotta have people that, when they grow up, they can participate in this community and be strong members of it and educated members. I feel like I am making a lot of positive contribution to Austin through my teaching because my kids grow up to be impactful people and my kids grow up to be people who have a stake in their community—a stake in their community, a stake in their world. And my kids grow up to know that what they do is important. And that, like I told my kids too, that math is not just about numbers, it's about problem solving and looking at patterns. And that's actually what life is about. So my kids are good at math, that means they're good at these skills that they're gonna use for the rest of their lives. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016)

Mrs. García

My initial meeting with Mrs. García took place at a coffee shop, and though my intent was merely to explain about my study and gain consent, over an hour later it was clear that she would not only agree to participate, but that she had valuable wisdom to contribute. For this reason and others, she reminded me greatly of my father's aunt whom we affectionately and simply called, "Tia." Growing up, Tia taught me to cook, shared a bedroom space with me, and often instructed me about life over a cup of her freshly made cinnamon tea. Throughout these times I came to know Tia as a warm, caring, mentoring friend who never shied away from saying what needed to be said. This first meeting with Mrs. García embodied these memories for me.

Ms. García taught seventh and eighth grade Spanish at Hunter Middle School. Having migrated to the U.S. at the age of 12, she identified as a Mexican woman who has made strong contributions to her U.S. society. Due to her education and current income status she felt she would be classified as middle class. She also described herself as Catholic, but having some problems with the church and questioning some aspects of the religion.

During our first interview together, Ms. García described the importance of a teacher's background and how sharing this with students can help build strong connections and relationships. She explained that as a result of her own background, she felt a strong connection with her students who had also migrated:

> I definitely feel more connection to my Nativos, that we share that same Spanish. And we share the same background in a sense. As immigrants. I feel more of a role model with them because they're just making this journey that I made. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

As hinted at through this statement, she found language to be a significant aspect of her identity and an important way to connect with students. Having first married a Palestinian, she recounted picking up some comprehension and speaking ability in Arabic and stated that she knows at least a few words in five different languages. She also reminisced about instances in which she shared different languages with students, such as singing "Silent Night" in Korean. She summed up these experiences saying, "it's just really cool when you can share language with your students" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

When I asked her the impetus for her becoming a teacher, Mrs. García recounted her participation with an orientation program at the junior college she attended for newcomers or freshman. She described being selected as a sophomore to help teach study skills and other orientation topics through the program. She recalled this experience:

> I liked being in front of the classroom. I liked teaching them. We had foreigners also and I liked that idea. Because I remember coming from Mexico and not knowing any English. And they knew English, but not a whole lot of speaking. So luckily I found it pretty early. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

After this experience she transferred from the south Texas junior college to another well-recognized four-year university in Texas and majored in education with a minor in Spanish and obtained a certification in social studies. Later she said she went back over the summer to take 12 graduate hours of coursework to become ESL certified.

Mrs. García's professional resume included over 30 years of teaching experiences. She stated that people have asked why she hasn't tried to become a

principal, but she expressed her contentment saying simply, “All I’ve ever wanted to do in my life is teach” (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Her teaching experiences in the United States were split by a brief time of teaching English in Mexico. Within the Austin metro area, she has taught in east-located schools and in a suburban, far north area. At the time of my interviewing her, Mrs. García had taught at HMS for seven years. She expressed her enjoyment of teaching at the school and of staying in one place for a while saying,

> I like the kids. I like the kids a lot. I like the community. I like the fact that after a while you know the parents, you start knowing their cousins. …. And I like setting roots and I think it’s good when you have a reputation and you don’t have to, like explain yourself anymore to them. They already know that you come through that door you better be ready for me. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

True to her desire to set roots she also related how she currently lived in North Austin (see figure 4.2) and had been there for 16 years.

Mrs. García had much to say when I asked her to describe herself as a teacher. Broadly, her teacher identity was defined as being realistic, motherly, playful, expecting much of her students. Her initial responses around being realistic focused on her commonly asked question, “How are you going to do that?” (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016). She identified her mother as the influence for this productive skepticism, saying her mom accomplished a lot, always asking how something would be done not to “knock you down,” but support realistic efforts and approaches to things. Most of her discussion centered on her identity as a “motherly” teacher. She spoke candidly saying, “Number one, you’ve got to care. If you don’t care

about the kids, if this is just a job, and you're just kind of suffering and just like, okay…. Maybe that person needs to find another job, you know?" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016). She further expanded: "your heart has to be in it." Though she described herself as being hard on her students, she said she was also fair and maintained a sort of "tough love" stance. She commented that she would take care of students if they needed something, often getting ahold of backpacks for newcomers or even buying shoes for students in the past. Her students, she chuckled as she shared, would say, "'you're like my mother! She's always telling this to us.' And I'm like, 'your mother's right! Listen to her!'" Even younger colleagues would call her mom sometimes, she added. Finally, regarding challenging students she offered the advice, "And the toughest ones to love are the ones that really need it the most" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016).

Her qualities of being realistic, playful, and holding high expectation were also evident throughout her comments about being a motherly teacher. She described pushing her students, wanting them to "win," supporting them in their future and dreams by challenging them saying such things as, "your future begins everyday when you wake up and you decide not to bring a paper or a pencil to school." She also checked her students' grades in other classes in addition to keeping up with their grades in her own class. In describing she whispered, "I'm like, 'is this your grade? Why are you failing three classes?' You know? And they're like, 'I don't know.' And I say, 'well go ask your teacher'" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016). Additionally, while

some teachers in the school considered cursing, insulting, and disrespect commonplace, this is not accepted in Mrs. García's class. With conviction she shared,

> In 30 years nobody, nobody, student, has ever cursed at me. And sometimes teachers have an expectation almost…. And we talk about that the first day of school. You're never going to hear a cuss word out of me. I will never curse at you…. This is my expectation of you. You're not going to curse at each other. I hear the word shut up and I say excuse me, did you just say the word shut up in my house? And they're like, 'I'm sorry miss!' You know shut up is not allowed in here. And they know that. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Mrs. García also layered these high expectations with playfulness. She stated that once relationships are established she can joke with students and that she has even playfully made bets with them to encourage them to strive for a better grade in their classes. Students reciprocated her playfulness, she said, often teasing her about her accent. Finally, she believed that parents' accounts of her would align to her self-ascribed motherly characteristic:

> I think parents would describe me as caring. I pick up the phone a lot. And I pick up the phone to call parents when they are making a change and when they are being good. And they are like, 'oh you're calling me with a good thing?' I pride myself on being very good with parents. Because I think they know where I'm coming from. And because I have the 'I'm a mom' card. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Throughout these discussions of her teacher identity and commitments it was clear she felt her work with her students mattered, that it made a difference in their lives and for their futures.

Mrs. Taylor

In my initial communications with Mrs. Taylor she expressed some reservations about participating in my study. Though highly recommended by school staff, she voiced

concern that she may not be the standard or typical case I was looking for. The more she shared, the more eager I was to have her participation. Through those early communications I came to understand Mrs. Taylor as an unconventional teacher who danced to her own rhythm. This characterization of her held similarities to my own stance as a teacher and piqued my curiosities, so I was overjoyed when she agreed (after some assurance that I was interested in her style of teaching) to participate.

Mrs. Taylor taught sixth grade science at HMS at the time of my study. She identified as White with German, English, and Irish ancestry. She also stated that she was a liberal democrat and atheist. Recognizing Austin's higher cost of living she positioned herself as middle class, though shared she had grown up very poor and had even experienced homelessness for eight months as a child. Because her parents were artists she recalled moving frequently and attending 13 different schools, something she felt offered her some similar experiences as those her students faced. She also recognized, though, that despite sharing low-income and transient experiences, she was not exposed to other experiences her students faced, such as gangs, drugs, and guns. Her beliefs about religion also set her apart as she stated her students were Catholic. Though she did not share about her beliefs with her students, fearing they would alienate them, she described sharing about her other similar experiences growing up with them, fostering a connection. Also supporting her ability to relate with her students, she told students that her husband was Hispanic and that she had two, middle-school aged boys (both of whom attended another, nearby school). She lamented, however, not knowing Spanish beyond understanding a few words or phrases.

Mrs. Taylor's career as an educator began as a result of her experience as a teaching assistant. She graduated from a highly ranked university located in the eastern United States. Her undergraduate degree was in anthropology with an emphasis in archaeology and a minor in geology. Because her husband was still working on his Ph.D. at the time of her graduation she said she decided to take a job as a teacher assistant in the meantime. She said that through this she realized her interest in teaching, so after having her two sons she went through region XIII to become alternatively certified. In all she had taught eight years, spending four years as an elementary teacher in a large Texas city north of Austin and four years as a middle school teacher. Her years as an elementary teacher were at a Title I school, similar she recounted, to HMS. At the time of my interviewing her, Mrs. Taylor was in her fourth year at HMS and she had just finished a Master's program in STEM at a prestigious university.

As I asked her about why she chose to teach at HMS, she explained that it really hadn't been intentional but had just came about. She remembered being interested in trying out middle school with the draw of being able to focus exclusively on her area of interest, science. She applied to several schools and was offered an eighth grade science position at HMS. She said later she realized it was because of the high turnover, but at the time she recalled being surprised. Ultimately, she described that her decision to teach at HMS was due to her interest in teaching at the middle school level, as well HMS being geographically closer to her than another position she was offered: "so I was really curious how middle school would be. I would love teaching science and it was right next to where I was living" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016). In all she

had lived in many areas of the United Stated over the course of her life, but currently lived in northwest Austin (see figure 4.2). Now having been at HMS for several years she stated her appreciation of the school and position:

> I like the kids. I really do like the kids. I've never come across any kid that I haven't liked one-on-one. They may have problems interacting with each other sometimes, but one-on-one they're fine. I like the freedom that I have. The trust that I have to run my classroom smoothly. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

I learned that as a result of her commitment to HMS and efforts she had been named "Teacher of the Year."

Mrs. Taylor described herself as open-minded, flexible teacher. She described this characteristic saying, "If something doesn't work, I will look for solutions to make it work. So I change things right away if something is not working. I'm not stuck in my ways" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Going along with this stance, she described how she was sometimes a rule breaking in a sense. In order to put on a science fair she had obtained permission from the principal to "stop" science for a couple weeks. She clarified that this meant she stopped what regularly happened in the classroom to focus all learning around the science fair.

Mrs. Taylor added that she was laid back and playful, describing the importance of not losing your cool with students and not taking things they said personally:

> Don't take anything personally that the kids say, because we're in middle school …. You can't let it affect you because you're an adult and they're kids …. I've had every name hurled at me and I don't take it personally. I know maybe they had a bad day or are just venting. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

She went on to clarify her reasoning for this stance saying:

> I just talk to them in a calm voice. Because we have a teacher … who drives me nuts because he yells at the kids all the time. And what happens when you yell at someone? Their brain shuts down and they won't listen. So there's no way to get them back on your side. There's no way that they could do anything you say. They're in defense mode. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

In expounding on her playful characteristic, she shared that she joked with students, occasionally used slang familiar to the students, and sometimes subtly and briefly engage in a dance move (e.g. "dab"). In reflecting on her own identity as a teacher and the many approaches and methods to teaching she stated simply that, "mainly you just have to love the kids. And if you love the kids, you care about the kids. And then you care about what they're learning. And then you figure out what's important. And you just figure out the best way to get it into them" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016).

As I asked Mrs. Taylor about what impact she felt she had as a teacher she concisely summed up her role saying,

> I think that I have inspired some kids to go to college. I think that I have made some kids realize that they are smart and can do science. I think that some of the kids that were bored in school are more interested now. I also think that most of them know that I care about them. And that I'm approachable and will help them solve problems. That there's trust; that not all White people are evil and stuff like that. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have presented a contextualization for the following chapters through the exploration of geography (places and spaces) and through an introduction to the teachers (the cases) of this study.

As can be interpreted from historical events and current trends, segregation is a great and unfortunate characterizing feature of Austin. This goes beyond racial segregation as it is conflated with wealth segregation. Though population movements have been influenced by the development of infrastructure, city planning, school busing, the growth of a strong tech industry, this has resulted in little diversifying of the city and, rather, we see inequitable pockets scattered (though mostly to the east) within a largely affluent city. HMS's situation is no exception. In the midst of a growing, developing, and wealth-increasing area, the school's population remains nearly fully low-income students of color who see (literally having to only look across the street in front of their school), but have limited access to this privilege—a phenomenon that is in some ways akin to what was experienced during the few years busing was instituted. These are the places, spaces, and conditions within which the teachers in this study found themselves. I found many of the details and conditions I described here to be present in the teachers' discussions around community.

In considering the teachers in this study, all three held knowledge around teaching through experience gain during the many years in the profession, as well as advanced education. All communicated a commitment to teaching and their students' success, grounded in a sense of care and love.

In the next three chapters I present each teacher one by one, sharing how each understood community and drew on those understandings within the classroom.

Chapter 5: Ms. Corazón

In this chapter, I present an in-depth accounting of one of my cases—Ms. Corazón. The chapter is broken into two main sections: 1. Ms. Corazón's conceptions of community, including how she described her students' communities and herself in relation to them, and 2. how community existed within her classroom.

PART ONE: CONCEPTIONS OF COMMUNITY

Overall, I found Ms. Corazón's general and more specific descriptions of communities overlapped a good deal. However, within this section, I chose to separate out some of the more general understandings from those that were more specific to her students' communities in order to navigate through some of the complexity and give each a more detailed focus.

What is a Community?

As I sat with Ms. Corazón in the outside patio of a local coffee shop nearby HMS, she seemed just as eager as I to begin conversation. With only a little prompting, she began sharing rich, nuanced, conceptual descriptions, peppered with both examples that informed her understandings as well as analogies that brought life to her explanations. In line with my questions, she began a very basic definition for community: "A collection of individuals with the same goals or needs or interests" (Ms. Corazón, personal

communication, March 5, 2016). She said the Pueblo Indians were the first picture that came to mind, saying, "I lived in houses all the time … and I thought how nice that you can have someone above you, beside you, next to you, across from you—that you can count on for whatever needs you have" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016).

As she continued considering community, Ms. Corazón drew on many more examples including: school districts and various, related sub groups (e.g. school and grades), businesses, prisons, places of residence, humanity, marginalized people groups, family, sports teams, U.S. states, and gangs. Throughout the rest of this section, I describe characteristics of community that came up in connection to these. These are: commonality, interdependence, norms, and dissonance.

Commonality. The most prominent theme that arose from Ms. Corazón's descriptions of community was commonality—that there must be something that all members of a community hold in common. As evidenced by her precursory definition, she described the necessity of a core element (i.e. commonality) for initiating the existence of a community. The most recurring commonality was a purpose, goal, or mission. She described her own experiences with her Professional Learning Community (PLC) at HMS saying, "[You have to] Define your mission. Well we're here for kids. We have to make sure that kids learn math. That they like math. That's an example" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016).

In addition to shared purpose, Ms. Corazón mentioned other commonalities including: interests, beliefs, values, geography, connection to an institution, aspirations or

hopes, something to lose, needs, experiences, or strong emotions associated to a particular person, group, or entity. Expounding on these, she drew on multiple examples. She used the context of school to describe how values of student-centeredness and respect for students aligned her with other teachers who shared these. Indicating geography, she drew on her own experience to describe living in an apartment complex. While mostly considering the institutional setting of school, she also described businesses and prisons as providing impetus for the formation of a community. Aligning herself with Malala Yousafzai (a Pakistani activist for female education), Ms. Corazón also considered herself to be in a community based on shared dreams. She used sports teams as an example of a group brought together, not only by a goal, but also by the threat of defeat. In clarifying the commonalities of experiences and strong feelings, she brought up marginalization. She described how being discriminated against or marginalized brought some together. From her explanations it also became clear she felt a foundational commonality did not preclude other shared commonalities within a group, a condition that connects with the next theme.

Interdependence. Ms. Corazón's explanations presented an idea of interdependence. She stated that the whole (i.e. community) is greater than the parts (i.e. individuals). Proposing the need for diversity, I asked what she meant. She indicated that various people bring differing capital (e.g. skills, resources) so that each contributes in unique, helpful ways. She shared:

> One of my favorite, favorite books when I was a kid was called stone soup. … There're three soldiers that are marching through a countryside and they're tired and hungry …. So they have to convince the people of

> the community to take them in, to feed them, and board them. … So their approach is to begin to … talk amongst themselves loud enough for others to hear and … say, 'okay we're gonna make stone soup,' and so they invite people. … they say, 'you know we could use a really big kettle,' and the people begin to pitch in. And previously hidden cabbages and potatoes, or a side of meat are offered into the soup and some people say, 'oh, well I have these carrots or something. … What we learn from this is everybody brings something to the table. If you have carrots or if this person has potatoes …when you put them in the soup it wouldn't be the same without the carrots or the potatoes. And so that's what I think of when community comes to mind. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016)

Referring to her PLC at HMS, she applied this saying she was connected to many communities, granting her significant capital to offer for the "stone soup."

These concepts of the whole being greater than the parts and people contributing in diverse ways tied to Ms. Corazón's assertion that members receive benefits from a community. She noted such benefits as protection, support, care, and dependability. A substantial element, she stated, "I think people have to get some feel like they're getting some benefit that they don't see without the community" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016).

Finally, part of Ms. Corazón's descriptions included a nuanced understanding of interconnectedness. Ms. Corazón felt there could be varying degrees of bonds between members. Tying to the theme of "commonality," she indicated that the degree of connection between members was directly linked to how many elements they had in common, as well as the level of significance those commonalities held. Because she strongly valued member contribution or participation in a community, she felt the strongest bonds based on, "how much a person contributes or advances the state of the

community" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016). This affected the health of a community—a concept inherent in the fourth theme, yet to be described. In explaining longer or shorter bonds, she shared her experience:

> I know there's some neighbors that I can go and ask for certain things and I know there's some neighbors that I'm just gonna interact with them on a surface level—I'm not going to invite those neighbors into my home. … So if there's somebody that has different values than me or, you know, participates in things that I don't participate in, that I don't agree with, they're welcome to live there … but I'm not going to have somebody [like that] … coming to my apartment. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016)

Despite weaker member bonds, she stated interdependence and relationship still existed.

Norms. "You have to have norms. If you don't have norms and agreements about how you're going to operate then it becomes really unstable" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016). "Norms" came up frequently as a critical element. Ms. Corazón described community as a mini society having rules, expectations, and culture. She said members must agree with a "social contract" for the community to function. Describing this, she stated, "It's usually by some agreement even if the initial reason for you being together is not voluntary—you participate in community" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016). As part of a community's social contract, she described several expectations (e.g. respect). She drew on her PLC as an example of the importance for balanced contributions of members. She described how one member didn't contribute to the group's work and the tension that created. Ms. Corazón further expounded that as a part of a social contract, functioning communities must have some accountability, possibly including communication and a conflict resolution process.

These assertions around contribution as an expectation led into the need for "roles." Ms. Corazón shared that leadership is needed for communities to function well saying, "at some point somebody has to be a leader. … Someone who delegates responsibilities. And hopefully, if it's done right, people share that responsibility, people share that leadership" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016). Expanding on this, she identified a nuance. She explained that individual member's capital can affect their role within a community. For instance, as a seasoned teacher she was positioned as a leader within her department team of beginning teachers.

Dissonance. The fourth theme that emerged differed significantly from the first three. In each of the first three themes, Ms. Corazón described healthy, high functioning communities. Implicit, however, was an understanding that a community can exist at a less than optimal level of health. She described conflict as naturally occur within communities, but said that how conflict was or was not addressed led to either a strengthening or damaging of a community.

Related to "interdependence," Ms. Corazón mentioned that competition between members and unequal benefit distribution can disrupt a community. Speaking of a school-to-prison pipeline (Texas Appleseed, 2015), she explained that some children engage in destructive behaviors because they recognize they have been pushed to the margins of the mainstream or dominant community and are not receiving their share of benefits or privileges. She said:

> [Marginalized] children already know that … they're not gonna be successful and that they are inherently part of a really small community and they're never going to get to participate in the bigger community.

> Because they won't have the skills and they won't have the keys to unlock the doors that will get them into those other communities, so they're basically destined to stay in that small pocket. So they're either going to make the most of it … or they feel like there is some violence that does need to be done to the outer community they're never going to be a part of. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016)

This exclusion disrupts interdependence and, unaddressed, leads to a dysfunctional community.

Most dissonance related to "norms." Ms. Corazón shared that when a community's expectations were broken, challenged, or disrupted, this caused conflict within the community. She again used her PLC as an example saying that when the community was disrespected in some way (e.g. a member consistently arriving late), this could cause damage to the group.

Ms. Corazón also described how lack of leadership causes a community to function poorly. She gave the example of the damage caused by too many new teachers coming into her school and district while older teachers who possessed capital to fill needed leadership, exited:

> When I came [to AISD] … everybody [in the seminar] was also new. … That's a lot of teachers who were leaving things that are understood and taken for granted in some cases. And those people leave, different people come in, and no one left notes behind …. And ultimately the bottom line is when you don't have that community … you're going to have a lot of kids fall through the cracks because we're not able to weave ourselves together tightly enough to keep kids from falling …. I come from [a more affluent school district and], all the teachers I taught with in the early 2000s, they're still at the same school …. That is a very tightly woven tapestry …. That community has a lot of advantages for their kids …. There's so much stability. Whereas I see here, there is a lot of instability, a lot of disconnect. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In all, she portrayed that dissonance could lead to a fragmented, dysfunctional community.

Macro Analysis. By the end of our conversations together, a broad framework for community had developed. Though I have presented four characteristic themes, Ms. Corazón's accountings were extensive and interwoven. I found it difficult to fully convey all the nuances of her conceptions, so here I briefly offer a few broader understandings.

Associated with commonality, Ms. Corazón brought noted that communities may be formed voluntarily or by force. For instance, while some communities form based on a shared interest or purpose (e.g. a sports team), many are a result of circumstance (i.e. forced), such as her PLC. She also referred to a community's level of functionality. She described a continuum along which communities can exist from high functioning to dissolved [see figure 5.1] saying that, "the more voluntary it is, the more high functioning it is and the less voluntary it is, I think the more dysfunctional it is" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016).

Throughout all, Ms. Corazón conceptualized community as an active, evolving (or devolving), reactive entity. She recognized that communities change over time and may dissolve, or even that a new community may be formed out of a dysfunctional community. She gave the example a school restructuring. Additionally, she understood communities in layered, overlapping ways, varying in size; she described her school being a community within the district and the district being a community within the state. At the micro school level she described other communities such as grade levels and

departments. These communities were presented as distinct but also overlapping so that members could pass between them.

Ms. Corazón also described fluidity around membership. She stated that people could enter temporarily as a "guest" (e.g. administrators entering her PLC) or that members could be pushed out or voluntarily leave. Relating how a member might be pushed out she said:

> I think it's very damaging when there's somebody in your community that enjoys all the benefits of the community then doesn't bring anything. … And that's okay if … you cannot. But if it's a repeated thing … they are pushing themselves to that outer ring. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016)

This indicates, that a member's actions can not only affect the community itself, but also that member's ability to be a part of the community. She explained this as a way for the community to protect itself. She also described an instance of members voluntarily leaving saying:

> And there's people who put themselves on the periphery or margins. There's people like me and many others that refuse to play the political game. … I refuse, then, to be part of a negative community. So there're times, I think when a community is so dysfunctional or just wrong that people voluntarily reject it. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

All of this demonstrated a very fluid and shifting nature of individual communities, as well as ability for communities to affect and influence each other.

Students' Communities

As I began asking Ms. Corazón about her students' communities, it quickly became clear that there were many parallels and overlapping characteristics with the

ways she had discussed the notion of "community" more broadly. However, the conceptualizations also differed. In this section, I begin by presenting specific communities that she identified and then build from this by considering characteristics that she attributed to these communities.

Specific communities. Through the interviews, four primarily micro scalar levels of student communities came up. Ms. Corazón described 1. AISD, 2. HMS, 3. subgroups within the school context (including her classroom), and then 4. groups outside of the school. AISD was more implicitly mentioned as her students' community as she described how students were affected by disruptions within the AISD community (e.g teacher attrition). However, HMS was strongly represented in her descriptions, both explicitly and implicitly through within-school subgroups. She also described the school as being part of the students' identities and mentioned past schools (i.e. the elementary school the student came from) as existing in a similar way. Further dividing up "subgroups within HMS," I found she mentioned student communities that existed during school hours and those that were after school. During school, mentioned: grade levels (e.g. 7th grade); teachers that students have or had; student-selected lunch table seating; assigned working groups during class time; English Language Learner (ELL) label; cliques; and herself—that is, her students in each class formed communities, and then all her students across all her classes formed a community. Connected to HMS but outside of school hours, she recognized sports teams (i.e. basketball, soccer, cheer, and volleyball), music groups (i.e. band and orchestra), and the campus' Boys and Girls Club.

Finally, Ms. Corazón described several communities her students belonged to that existed unrelated to HMS or AISD. These began at the micro level of family and neighborhood or apartment complex, and then extended to a slightly larger scale (e.g. churches or religious groups). On a macro level, national and international communities were brought up (e.g recognizing students' family in Mexico or Argentina). She described students belonging to cultural, racial, and ethnic groups, specifically drawing attention to "Latin" or "Hispanic" and "African American" identification, and noted their participation in politics.

Specific Communities in Participant-Taken Photography. Ms. Corazón's photography prominently positioned the school. With few exceptions, photographs were taken within the HMS building. The exceptions included HMS's outside parking area and a select few other off-campus locations in which HMS events took place. Throughout the pictures it was clear that people and interpersonal relationships were key. As the photographs revolved around HMS, the people represented included students, teachers, administrators, and adults involved with HMS.

The photographs, and Ms. Corazón's descriptions of them, gave a clear portrayal of HMS as the context for students' communities. Ms. Corazón had not only taken pictures of events and groups connected to the school, but also included symbols and quotes aligned with the school's mascot and theme. She included an image of the bulletin board just outside her classroom that was covered in inspirational quotes connected to the school's theme.

Ms. Corazón's classroom was presented as a student community. The first pictures she and I discussed were photographs of a collage. At the top of the collage the poster read, "This will be my best year of math because…," "Math is important because," and "Our classroom should be _____ everyday." Forming the collage were various handwritten responses to each of the prompts by her students on multi-colored, rectangular pieces of paper (see Image 5.1). She explained that this was a project all her classes had participated in at the beginning of the year. She also included images that showed students actively working together on various projects, such as a spaghetti and marshmallow tower (see Image 5.2), a paper folding exercise to find the area of a three dimensional object (see Image 5.3), and a "Kahoot" web-based, math challenge in which students worked on teams to solve problems for points awarded for both speed and accuracy. She also took pictures to show her seventh-grade students preparing together to take the eighth grade STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness), a high-stakes, standardized exam. In addition to these representations, the photographs showed students acting as "guest teachers"—a student who would individually, or with a friend, stand at the document camera and work out a math problem for his or her peers to see on the projector screen.

Groups and events outside of school hours were also represented. Extracurricular groups were fore fronted in the majority of these images. These groups included: Think It Up Live, sports teams, a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) community night, orchestra, clubs, and Community Connection Camraderie. As the sponsor of Think It Up Live, Ms. Corazón described engaging with

four students to put together a proposal for a unique project that would support their school. She had taken images of the students' poster that they presented at the local competition. Describing her photographs of sports teams, she identified basketball, soccer (see Image 5.4), cheerleading, and volleyball. Explaining the STEAM event, she stated that there were booths with activities for students and families. She had taken a picture of a circuit project some of the students engaged with that night (see Image 5.5). Supporting her descriptions of music groups in a previous interview, Ms. Corazón had also taken photographs of an orchestra recital. Recognizing clubs as student communities, she included a picture of a poster that named various HMS clubs, such as Anime club, Tech Girls, and AIM HIGH. She also photographed a Saturday morning event held by a group called Community Connection Camaraderie that attempted to connect girls to resources in the community.

In addition to these extracurricular groups, Ms. Corazón also documented events that occurred in connection with HMS, but after school hours. One event was an end-of-the-year honor ceremony. She described that students, administrators, teachers, parents, and friends attended to support students who were recognized for outstanding characteristics. She also took pictures of the school's spring dance and included a photograph of a flyer advertising a fundraiser with a fast food restaurant across the street from the school.

Beyond classroom and outside-of-school-hours groups and events, the photographs also offered a glimpse of students communities as existing across spaces, highlighting an element of time. That is, Ms. Corazón included images related to

students' future, documenting a high school vertically aligned with HMS and describing how students had visited the school to connect to their (potentially) future campus. Illustrating a college focus, some pictures showed "college week" posters in HMS's hallway (see Image 5.6) and a college engagement event.

In all, the photographs and descriptions portrayed student communities as groups of students and others in relationship with them that existed through some connection with HMS.

Characteristics of her students' communities. Through Ms. Corazón's descriptions of her students' communities, several distinct qualities emerged. These included: commonality, interdependence, dissonance, and resistance

Commonality. In each example of a student community, some commonality was present. Consistent with Ms. Corazón's more general explanations of communities, the student communities revolved around shared purposes or goals (e.g. sports teams), interests (e.g. music groups), beliefs (e.g. churches), and geography (e.g. apartment complexes) to name a few. The most prominent commonality throughout her photography, however, was HMS. Within the school context, she described teachers as serving as a strong link or bond. She explained that having (or having had) certain teachers was seen among students as a sort of "badge of honor." Related to this, her photographs often positioned Ms. Corazón, herself, as central to the communities portrayed. This was evident through the representations within the classroom. Moreover, when I asked what photograph best represented her students' communities, she said that if she would have been able to take a class photo that included all her students from all

periods, that it would have been it. All this conveys that each community was not only formed around a commonality, but also that Ms. Corazón felt the school was important, connecting in some way to most of the communities her students participated in.

Another commonality significant in her descriptions was identity. She described HMS as a part of her students' identities, but also talked about gender, race, culture, ethnicity, and language status (i.e. ELL) as forming communities. So though, most attention was given to communities that revolved around HMS, she also recognized students' macro communities that extended far beyond the walls of the school, forming national and international connections.

Interdependence. Ms. Corazon's explanations also highlighted an interdependence and interconnectedness, such as described when she spoke of communities more broadly. When I asked how she would characterize her students' communities she responded with an analogy:

> I would say strong and just really interwoven. … Some of [the kids] are in everything, and some are only in one little thing, but they are still a part of the tapestry. I think we're very connected and I know, I feel like the kids know, that they can depend on me—that they can come to me with a lot of concerns, from home or from school. … I think a lot of us are interwoven and very strongly connected. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

Expanding on this notion of being interwoven, she also described a relational and reciprocal nature that she, herself, had experienced as a part of a community with her students. She shared:

> I've taught in other schools before and other districts and always have this really good connection with kids and with students. … But there was something special about [HMS]. … I don't want to leave the campus. … I

> feel like this is where I need to be.… And [the students] had a positive impact on me. I had a rough year before. … a lot of personal tragedies in my life. … But here I got a lot of energy from my kids. I normally am pretty enthusiastic and I'm pretty spastic and I'm a little crazy. These kids accepted me exactly how I am. And they played along with me. And when I said everybody gets an opportunity to come dance, they would get up and do it. And that's pretty big for a 13-year-old to get up and do that. … For them to step out of themselves and do something like that for me, and for themselves, and for their peers—you know they're my kids. … And I feel like these kids, they love me and they know I love them too. And I actually would say that to them. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

Here she recognized and acknowledged sociocultural norms of the community, but described how a reciprocal interdependence within the class community had led to the students' actions, superseding a normative aspects of their larger youth, cultural community.

This reciprocity within the community also highlights benefit. Ms. Corazón offered ways students benefit from being part of communities. She felt the more connections students had at school, the less isolated they felt, decreasing the likelihood of "floundering" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016). Moreover, she described that connectedness offered students social capital. Describing this dynamic within the HMS community she said:

> These little connections … help kids to develop some kind of cultural capital on our campus where they can exchange those kind of things. Everybody knows that this kid is good at basketball, … or this kid gets along well with teachers, or this kid, even though he's always tardy, he's respectful. … And you know different things about each other. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In addition to counteracting isolation and offering capital, the notion of support came up multiple times within our conversations and can be considered a benefit. One experience

that seemed very impactful to Ms. Corazón was when she observed students aligning themselves with each other against a teacher who they perceived as threatening. She explained that a teacher had chosen to use political events as an opportunity to help students learn how to engage productively in debate. Recognizing the students' frustrations with racist assertions and accusations, the teacher had picked a clip from one of Donald Trump's campaign speeches as a prompt. However, because the teacher was White, the students became outraged at seeing the paused image of Donald Trump up on the projector screen as they entered the classroom. Thinking the teacher was a Trump supporter, they immediately walked back out of the classroom in protest. Having witnessed this, Ms. Corazón described her fascination with how the students' membership to a larger ethnic community had led to their organic unity and support of each other. She shared:

> So it was really interesting how on an individual basis they made decisions to get out [of the classroom] and then when their other peers also refused to enter, or entered and then left, that was like a community that belonged to a larger context of what was going on. So they're very aware. … So obviously their parents had talked about it. Obviously their community had talked about it. … [The students] wanted to show their solidarity and not go into the room immediately. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

She stated that support was an important, but difficult aspect of her student's communities to photographically capture. Boasting of students' supportiveness of other community members, she rebutted the criticism that seventh graders are, "horrible monsters that are mean and spiteful," saying, "They're not. They're sweet. And in these

pictures you can't tell exactly how sweet, loving, and supportive they were" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Ms. Corazón also shared how interconnectedness can exist to varying degrees (i.e. stronger and looser bonds). She described how commonalities could be compounded to form greater connection:

> It's like a network. So this kid is in [a certain teachers'] class for history. He had [another teacher], plays soccer—so he's part of all these communities. So there's an interdependence, interconnectedness where there's somebody else that has the same exact connection. So they have stronger bonds. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

As evidenced here, she recognized that her students simultaneously belonged to multiple, nested and overlapping communities. In addition to affecting bonds, she also described that in some cases these overlapping communities functioned in harmony (e.g. her classroom communities that are discussed in part two), while at other times they were at odds (e.g. students forming unsanctioned communities within a classroom that had forced communities in place).

Dissonance. The theme of dissonance or disruption was also present in Ms. Corazón's remarks on student communities. She described student actions that disrupted or had potential to disrupt the classroom community (e.g. off-topic conversations or lack of participation). She also shared how conflict in other communities could overlap and enter the classroom community. She described two particular instances: one in which a group of friends had had disagreement and as a result, one of the students did not want to sit in her assigned seat with her peers; another time a student had had a difficulty in a class prior to hers and she knew that would continue to affect him and his peers in her

class. She also included herself as a potential source for disruption, remembering how she had once incorrectly graded her students' tests.

In addition to describing internally-originating disruptions, Ms. Corazón's reflections also suggested that students' communities can be affected by external factors. Returning to teacher attrition, she described how students were not given the same educational opportunities as schools and districts that had significantly greater teacher retention and felt her students' community (i.e. AISD) was more unstable and disconnected than others. Other external disruptions included national and worldwide social issues. Specifically, she brought up gender oppression, and the African American community and the "all lives matter" controversy. Sensitive to the student population she also recognized the impact of racist remarks within the presidential election campaign. In these examples, larger social issues were understood as impacting her students as they were part of marginalized, gender- and race-based communities.

Resistance. In response to conflicts within their communities, Ms. Corazón explained how students engaged in actions of resistance. One way was to construct new communities in the midst of a forced, artificial community. She stated:

> I see a lot of classes where kids are … put in teams, and that's for the district expectation for doing pair share. So it's kind of perfunctory in a way, but it's not really community building. I think it's used as a means toward an end. … I think it's artificial and I think more could be done with it. And then I do see some classrooms where kids are put into groups and that's only for the appearance of the groups, and that's even more artificial. Because what happens is the kids are just talking over one another. And they do create their own communities. And they are basically islands and they're isolated within the classroom. And there's not a common agenda, not a common goal, and there's not a common culture and those classrooms and the teachers really struggle. And they

> hate it. But they keep it that way because the district wants to see groups, especially in math. And so it just breeds this air of lost opportunity. I think it just further isolates kids, and it builds cliques. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Here she described students choosing to distance themselves from a forced classroom community that they found to not be functioning well. Additionally she witnessed students constructing new, albeit unsanctioned, communities in response to superficial communities.

In addition to opting out of a community, Ms. Corazón also stated that students act out against their community when they find it dysfunctional. She gave the example of students experiencing racism, not receiving privileges and benefits from a community that others in the same community were being given. Giving an example of across-school inequity she said:

> If you're a person who feels marginalized,… and I've explicitly worked with Title I campuses where it's high minority population and you have institutionalized racism that exists and you have privilege, … you can have individuals that feel so disappointed, who feel shut out and feel like you're not getting anything from the community. So they act out in a way that's like I'm not getting anything anyway. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

She explained this more concretely, describing students' acute awareness of schools only a few miles away that had ipads for every student and other resources that they did not. Keenly aware of differential privilege and benefits within their geographic community, she said students might act out in unproductive protest or in fruitful resistance, such as pushing for higher test scores (similar to how Solorzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) described transformational resistance).

Ms. Corazón's Sense of Self in Relation to Her Students' Communities

Ms. Corazón's remarks during the interviews, as well as her photography and mapping of her students' communities, all revealed that she considered herself to be a part of her students' communities, with specific focus on their school and family communities. In her own words:

> I feel like I'm really invested into this community and a big part of it. And I know a lot of parents. I know a lot of teachers. And I've helped a lot of teachers and parents. And I spent a lot of time on the phone. If I made a phone call it was always at least fifteen minutes per parent. And some parents I spent 45 minutes on the phone with them. As they had a lot of things they want to get off their chest regarding the student. When I would finally meet this parent face-to-face, we already knew each other's voice, and we were in each other's history. So I feel like I came into this community a year ago and I feel like I've really woven myself into it. That I'm really a big part of it. I feel connected. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Within her photography she included herself and on the map she symbolically connected her geographic residence with the school campus with hearts, showing her recognition of the geographic distance between her and her students' residences, but feeling fully connected despite this. Though this was her first year at the school, she described how she had been deliberate and active in efforts to become a part of the school community (including families) and intended to stay, even until retirement if possible. She also stated that at past schools she had felt part of the community—evidenced by non-school-related invitations to students' church functions, choir performances, hockey games, soccer games, and birthdays—and expected to continue building this at HMS. Furthermore, she desired to move and join students' geographic community.

In the remainder of this section, I include examples of ways that Ms. Corazón actively worked to engage with and become part of students' communities and the benefits that she felt she received from being a part of those communities.

Working to become part of her students' communities. There were four ways that Ms. Corazón described working to become a member in or participate with her students' communities: 1. engaging with students outside of the classroom or standard curriculum, 2. connecting with parents, 3. as a teacher, aligning herself with the school, and 4. repairing any disruptions to the communities.

Engaging with students. A commitment that Ms. Corazón described making after her children were grown was to attend every single girls' sports game—home and away. This vow, she explained, was born out of her recognition of unequal attention and attendance between girls and boys sports. She recalled her own experiences and challenges as a middle school girl and wanted to be an advocate for her female students. Sports, then, became one means for this. Recounting her excitement at one of the girls' games she attended, she said she asked a student if she had gone overboard. The student responded:

> No Miss, you're welcome every game. Yeah you're loud and yes sometimes you are kind of a scene but we like to have you there. …I know that every game I go to, miss [Corazón] is gonna be there and there's no doubt who she's cheering for. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

This acceptance into the female athletes' communities was further confirmed by their looking for her at games, and their excitement to talk about the game the next time they came to class.

This commitment did not preclude her from attending boys' games, however, and she remembered volunteering as the bookkeeper for a boy's basketball game. She also described going to music recitals and school events that took place after school hours (e.g. the school's dance). One reason she valued extracurricular events was that it gave her a chance to have informal meetings with parents. She shared that parents would "charge" her with their students:

> [Parents] give me full benefit, full authority over their child. They see me there, invested, and they personally authorize me and tell me, 'if this kid does anything, you call me immediately and I will fix it.' And they would do that for any teacher, but I get the benefit of having that being told to me face-to-face. … I mean I'm not going to really do that but I do have the extra connection that [in the classroom] I'll say, 'hey, you know what? Your auntie was at the football game and she told me ….' So I get extra collateral that I can use in my communities" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

As this conveyed, she felt attending games, performances, or other events awarded her a special connection and recognition with both her students and their parents. However, she also indicated that, while she drew on this capital, she would not reject a member by simply turning him or her over to a parent; rather *she* addressed disruptions (talked about in part two). She chuckled as she recalled how her participation with one of her students' teams had caused a student to take on the role of "bouncer" within her classroom, demanding that her peers be quiet and pay attention:

> So anytime I would say anything, if the kids were talking I would say, 'I'm waiting. … Give me five.' … And [this particular student athlete would] be like, 'can y'all please give her five. Give her five. You all shut up and give her five.' So … I said, 'that's really nice for you to support me, but let's use nice words. Shut up is not acceptable in this classroom. … I don't tell anyone to shut up in the classroom. I can't say it, you can't say it.' So she said, 'be quiet.' You know she's my social corrector, but

> she's just so dramatic. But she actually just built [classroom management] for me. … I didn't ask her to do that, but because she likes me, I have that advantage. That's a huge chip in my cultural capital. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In addition to engaging with her students in their extracurricular interests, Ms. Corazón also mentioned other ways she attempted to build relationship with her students. She shared that at the beginning of the year, she ate lunch in the cafeteria with seventh graders on a daily basis. Moving from table to table each day, she said that it took three weeks for her to be able to cover all three hundred students. She felt that this effort was valuable and provided her with a special social capital to draw on within the classroom. She explained:

> [Now] I can just call [students] out because I personally know their names. I have a strong relationship and bond because I've broken bread with them. You know, I have cheered them on. … I just enter those [communities] and it's kind of like by invitation only. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

While getting to know students personally, she also shared her own personal interests with them, engaging with them beyond the district's assigned curriculum. She said her students knew she listened to music from the eighties and would tease her about it. When Prince died, she posted a purple heart on the door and told her students about affinity for him, listening to his music since being in seventh grade. She said students took the matter seriously because of the significance it held for her saying, "The kids were really supportive. Even though he wasn't a family member of mine, they knew about Ms. [Corazón] being from the eighties and so they were cool about that" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Connecting with parents. Also seeking connection with her students' parents, Ms. Corazón recounted how she had spent the first weeks of school calling every single parent. She said that only five were unreachable due to phone disconnection. In her conversations with parents, she explained her desire to begin on a positive note, set up a constructive relationship for the rest of the year, and align herself as an ally with parents, setting the goal of their student's success. Beyond initial phone calls and conversations with parents at extracurricular events (as already described), she mentioned going out of her way to meet a parent or relative if she saw them with one of her students in the office or hallways. She said she would simply approach and ask her student to would introduce her. Again, Ms. Corazón stressed the importance these brief meetings being positive encounters. She explained this saying:

> So I make sure to say something positive. Like I'll say something like, 'you know the other day so and so did a really nice job on something.' I have to have something positive to say about that child. So I think because of that, parents do consider me a part of their community. Because I'm not just coming in to invade and bash down their child. They know that I'm there to support, that I'm on the same team." (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Though she worked to remain positive during these informal conversations, she also stated that she didn't hesitate to pick up the phone when an issue arose in class with a particular student.

Aligning with HMS. Beyond actions related to relationship building with her students and parents, Ms. Corazón also described her effort to align with the school and be proactive in addressing any community dissonance. She showed me her bulletin board and explained how she found quotes and images that matched HMS's theme. She felt that

as a result of her being a part of her students' communities, her students respected her and did not tear up the bulletin board, something she saw happen on a regular occasion to other boards around the school. She also described efforts to repair any disruptions to her classroom community, giving the examples of calling a parent or speaking with a student individually whenever an issue arose that violated class expectations or had potential to interrupt the class. She shared that she had made a mistake on grading a test once when her answer key got off and described her communication efforts with her students, their parents, and school staff to correct the issue.

PART TWO: "COMMUNITY" IN THE CLASSROOM

Ms. Corazón's classroom was located in the only second floor hallway on campus. The hallway was designated as the seventh grade corridor and her room was at the very end of the hallway next to a stairwell. The windows in her room overlooked the courtyard space that led to the entrance of the school. In our first interview together she described her classroom to me by saying, "This particular domain is their home. … They have to feel at home, comfortable" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, February 26, 2016). When I asked her about how an outsider visiting one of her classes might describe the space she said, "I think an outsider would come in and hopefully see … that it's safe" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Here, I describe Ms. Corazón's classroom and how community existed within her teaching practices. She viewed her classroom space, including herself and students, as a

community and facilitated her classes as such. Before delving into this I briefly present some beliefs she held about teaching as I found these evidenced in her actions.

Ms. Corazón described that, for teachers, it is critical to treat children with respect and dignity, facilitate teamwork, and be invested in a child's success and welfare. She remarked that, "A good teacher is somebody who genuinely wants to be [at his/her school]. It's somebody who's willing to invest their time and their energy—their person, their whole self, in a holistic way, to connect with other human beings" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016). She also stated that teachers don't teach subjects, they teach children and gave a litmus test for measuring respect saying, "if you wouldn't talk to a friend a certain way, why would you talk to a kid that way?" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016). In addition to treating students with dignity, she also asserted that students are an investment into humanity's future. She said she told her students: "I will only be with you for one year, and you will only need me this one year…. I'm gonna need you for the rest of my life. So it does me more good if you're educated" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016). She recalled how students laughed with her as she told them that one day she would be a viejita (elderly woman) walking into their doctor office and depend on them to be knowledgeable. She also stated that good teaching is cooperative, facilitating teamwork. Part of this, teaching should foster communication and accountability.

In all, she communicated a strong commitment to her students, but also recognized her limitations. She remarked, "I only do what I can in my classroom. … It's

taken me years to learn this. I only have control of what happens within my proximity" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 5, 2016).

Constructing a Community Space: Norms in the Classroom

Through our conversations as well as my visits to Ms. Corazón's classes, it became clear she deliberately facilitated a classroom environment in which particular norms were developed and upheld. I categorized these classroom norms as: 1. functioning as a team, 2. expecting great things, and 3. holding everyone accountable to these norms for the community's well being.

A team. "We're all in this boat together. And if one of you is doing something that's not helpful, it's akin to drilling holes in the boat. We're all gonna go down" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016). This statement, told to her students, showed interdependence, a consistent theme throughout Ms. Corazón's teaching approach. This was also evident during through her teaching I witnessed, and the physical layout of the space. Ms. Corazón had triangle-shaped desks that she arranged in sets of four so that they connected to form one larger square shape. She explained that each set was called by the name of a *university* and that she allowed her students to choose it. Throughout the year she changed up the student groupings, but the group-style setup of the classroom remained the same. When I asked her to share more she said:

> Students get to choose their own [groups]. It's done differently—sometimes I'll just assign kids. Sometimes it's by who I don't want to sit together and I'll make that decision. … And I always say, 'choose wisely. Don't select your friends all the time. Choose someone that you haven't worked with.' Or, 'it doesn't have to all be boys. There can be boys and girls mixed up. Try to make it a nice diverse group. Try to pick somebody that you know works really hard.' I really try to temper it that way, but I

> like to let them choose their own teams. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Demonstrated here is a focus on groups that foster diversity and academic achievement. Handing me a paper that listed "Captain," "FedEx," and "Materials Manager," said that these were the roles held by students. Under each was a description of responsibilities. She continued her explaining the groups saying:

> So teamwork. ... And I am really explicit about, 'the captain is not the boss.' And I say, 'the captain is the hardest working person. They are patient and they oversee and when there're substitutes here, they are supposed to keep charge of their team. … And the material managers must make sure that we have all the materials, and then the FedEx people will make sure I get all papers so I don't have to manage that. They separate papers for me if there're things that are passed out. ... So everybody has a job.' And I tell them, 'we depend on you. If you're not here, the class won't run as well. If you're not here the group won't run as well. Someone else will have to do your job for you.' It's a silly thing, but it builds this, 'you're a necessary part of our classroom. You're a necessary part of your team.' (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Throughout my observations, I found these teams were foundational for Ms. Corazón's teaching. She had teams work on assignments collaboratively and acknowledged and rewarded successes based on the team working diligently together. This grouping did not preclude the class working as a whole as well, though. This is brought up in the section: "Learning to Be a Community."

In addition to setting up the classroom to facilitate teamwork, Ms. Corazón directly called students to support each other. During my visits to her classes she showed two different movie clips to encouraged an all-for-one attitude. Fitting for the spring semester's testing gear up, she played a short clip of Rocky Balboa in training with his coach. She asked students why she had chosen it and they suggested that it was for the

STAAR. She then asked what Rocky was doing and pointed out how he had to exercise to build endurance in preparation for his competition, paralleling this to the students' work for STAAR. She also asked them to note Rocky's trainer or partner and told students it was important they work together as a team to prepare saying, "You're getting stronger, they're getting stronger. Notice that no one's pulling each other down" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, April 19, 2016). Similarly, she played a short clip from the movie Lilo and Stitch during another class. The clip clearly and simply stated: "Chana means family. Chana means no one gets left behind." Again Ms. Corazón entreated students not to leave anyone in the class behind stating, "Does it take away from your brain if you help someone? Nope. It actually makes you smarter" (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, May 2, 2016).

Part of the class community norm of working together, Ms. Corazón also stressed the importance of students being honored by her and peers. She lamented the school did not do this with greater commitment, as there was only one small, school-wide honor ceremony at the end of the year. In her classroom, she worked to make sure students received recognition for their accomplishments. She described having students stand for each other when a classmate was recognized for his/her success (e.g. a win in a sporting event) over the announcements. She also honored students through rewards such as "lunch bunch" passes (i.e. a pass to eat lunch in her room with friends), dance tickets, snacks, or credit for a library book fair. Beyond this, she stood outside her door shaking the hand of each student as s/he entered, clapped for students, and gave them a "high

five" for solving challenging problems. She also regularly thanked and praised students during and at the end of class periods.

Expectations. Ms. Corazón's expectations of students, as well as their expectations of her and each other, also served as a community norm. She described a connection between her participation in her students' communities and her expectations of them in the classroom:

> I went to almost every one of the [students'] recitals and I was just blown away at how much talent these kids have. Just amazing what they could do. … So I think if you show up to these events, these recitals, and you see kids outside of the elements of where they are in class—this kid can play the tuba, oh my God I didn't know he could do that. And this little girl fiddling away in her violin—then it just reinforces, it gives you the feeling that wow these kids can do so much. So your expectations for them in the classroom are raised so much. If you didn't have high expectations before, you get them. But I think, even if you did, that it will raise them so much—I know you can turn in your homework and do a good job at it, and I know when you're pretty much skating in class, and that kind of thing. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

Through my conversations with her and my observations, I found that Ms. Corazón consistently pushed students, believing they had the capacity to not only complete a task, but also go further by completing additional challenges or helping others. As indicated in the statement above, she felt her out-of-class interactions with students drove this, causing her to expect more and see students as more capable that she would have without the outside experiences. She remarked that if she were principal, she would strongly encourage teachers to engage in extracurricular events with students so that they would gain this insight. Her expectations also included students taking ownership in their learning each day by getting their warm-ups, making sure their pencils were sharpened,

and going to their assigned seats upon entering class. She said this students knew this procedure and that she made all materials available to them. This highlighted a clarity and consistency she maintained with her students in order to support their academic success.

In addition to recognition of students' capabilities and expectation to see this in the classroom, Ms. Corazón also created space for students to establish their own expectations. As described in Part One, she used the first week to engage students in sharing what they wanted the classroom and their learning to be like (See Image 5.1). She mentioned they were specifically concerned that they not be yelled at, something they had experienced in other classes. This led, she recounted, to a discussion of respect and her committing to never yell or curse at them or be disrespectful. Drawing from "Capturing Kids' Hearts," she described the importance for developing a social contract with each class and explained how she went about this:

> "How do you want to be treated by me the teacher? How do you want to be treated by your peers? How do you think your peers want to be treated by you? How do you think the teacher wants to be treated by you? You ask those essential questions and kids usually come up with the word 'respect.' In the eight years that I've done social contracts, respect is always the first word." (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In setting high expectations for student accomplishment and participation, as well as a standard of respect (including no verbal attacks) between members, she felt this created a safe space.

A small, but noteworthy expansion upon these norms was how Ms. Corazón treated "guests." When outsiders entered the classroom, she welcomed them and showed

them respect. As I entered her classroom she greeted and shook my hand just as she did with her students. I also observed her welcome of a new tutor, telling the class, "he knows math and will help a lot" (observation, April 25, 2016). In addition to welcoming and respecting adult guests, she extended this to students temporarily in her classroom. She engaged them in learning and invited them to participate, just as she did her own students. I noted that she gave individual attention to a visiting student (sent by another teacher for a "timeout") to catch her up on what the class was doing so that she could participate (observation, April 27, 2016).

Supporting her efforts to facilitate a safe space in which students were respected and expected to excel, I noted through my observations that Ms. Corazón often did things to instill confidence in her students. She regularly repositioned students' mistakes in their work as an anomaly rather than criticizing them for not knowing the material. During one class I attended, students were engaged in an online-based activity called, "Kahoot" (described in the section, "Learning to Be a Community"). After students had answered a math problem Ms. Corazón asked them, "Those that got it wrong, let me figure out. Is it because you were trigger happy and pressed the wrong button?" Then, after seeing the results of the next question, she playfully rubbed her hands downward over her face and exclaimed, "What?! Half of you got it wrong?" and told them that it was better to do a problem correctly than go fast (observation, April 14, 2016). On another occasion she asked a student why he had missed a problem and he playfully responded, "Miss, I was under pressure!" to which she and all the students laughed goodheartedly (observation, April 28, 2016). Despite giving students a way to excuse their incorrectly answered

problems, Ms. Corazón showed attentiveness to their need for support and worked out each missed problem with them.

As I completed my observations during the weeks leading up to the STAAR, I noticed that much of Ms. Corazón's efforts to encourage students' confidence was framed by the test. She consistently undermined notions of the test being too difficult by telling students how capable they were. On more than one occasion she called students' "smart cookies" and passed out a cereal in the shape of a cookie (observations, April 28, 2016 and May 2, 2016). During one class she paused and told students she was going to tell them a secret. She continued, saying that they already knew nearly everything on the test and asked, "Are we here to pass it or ace it?" to which the students yelled, "Ace it!" She affirmed their response, singing part of the chorus line from "Beat It" (observation, April 20, 2016). Finally, as I described her playing the clip of Rocky Balboa training, she also played a variety of encouraging songs at different times (e.g. as students entered and while they worked on a problem). She used songs that made statements such as "it's the final countdown," "we will rock you," and "we are the champions."

Accountability. The third characteristic I found represented was accountability. As a team, all class members were accountable for adhering to community norms and upholding the community's health and functioning. This meant that some form of action, either a consequence or correction, had to be used to address any dissonance within the community.

Natural Consequences. One way that I found accountability was through the issuance of consequences for community disruptions. Reinforcing the importance for

students to respect and support not only their universities, but also the class as a whole, Ms. Corazón described holding students to this standard through natural consequences:

> 'If you're not able to contribute to your little community, if you're taking away from them, then that's that. … If Harvard University keeps talking then LSU gets points and Harvard gets nothing.' And after a while the kids from Harvard say, 'hey how come MIT is ahead?' … I say, 'because you're talking and taking away from the rest of the class.' So I suggest that someone from Harvard goes in the back [of the room]. And it's an unspoken thing that children know it's *that* kid. Like, the decision's made. And that kid will either argue or accept it, and if they argue sometimes the other colleges will stand up and say, 'yes you, you need to move.' So they're not rejected and removed from the whole community, they are just excused from that part momentarily. They're only taking, so the consequence is they don't get to partake. But they still get to learn and they don't get to wander the hallway. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

As suggested through this comment, I found that Ms. Corazón not only used natural consequences to hold students accountable, but also positioned them as community leaders by creating space for their involvement in awarding consequences. Moreover, she never rejected a student from the class community, only allowed correction within it. With learning as the goal, natural consequences served to stop disruption while keeping students engaged in the class.

Ms. Corazón also described a student participating in giving himself a consequence. She recalled that a student had lied to her sub one day and shared her interaction with this student:

> As I saw him in the hallway, … I called him and I said, 'hey you know the sub told me that you told her something yesterday.' And he looks down at the floor. And I said, 'can you tell me what you told her?' And he said, 'I told her that I was going to another class.' And I said, 'is there anything else you told her besides that?' 'I told her you gave me permission.' 'Is there anything you would like to say about that?' 'I get detention.' 'Which

> kind?' 'After school?' 'Yeah. Is this gonna happen again?' 'No.' 'All right.' We understand and we shake hands. And he goes on his way. So I didn't accuse him, I didn't issue the consequence. He issued it to himself. And he knew what the consequence was. And he admitted it. Because I have a relationship with him and that's part of our community. … And I'm gonna have to call his mom and tell her. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Throughout this description she engaged the student respectfully, supporting his role as an active community member while maintaining expectations through addressing a disruption. She also brought in an outside community—the student's mom—showing connection and accountability even to students' home communities. In other instances she showed respect for students by giving them a chance to correct their community violation. She reminded students that they were not allowed to have phones out and asked one student if he would like for her to put his phone in "daycare" or if he would prefer to put it away himself (observation, April 27, 2016).

These consequences did not seem punitive or demeaning, rather, Ms. Corazón approached them as "business." I include one more example as it not only demonstrates this , but also highlights students' accountability to the whole community. She recounted telling a student:

> 'It's not personal, just business. That's the consequence, you are choosing it. … You just made a bad choice and it will cost you. … It cost us 20 minutes of class time, but you can pay back with 90 minutes in afterschool detention. … If you think about it, because it cost each one of the kids here, … it's a fair trade because everybody suffered.' (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Explaining the cost the rest of the class endured, the student wasn't just issued a consequence, he was involved in thinking about the effect his choice had on the

class community. This matter-of-factly approach thwarted subjective, emotion-driven type punishments Ms. Corazón said she observed in other classes (e.g. rejecting a student from class before it began because the teacher had had past conflicts with the student).

Returning to the treatment of guests in the classroom, Ms. Corazón also held visitors accountable for their disruptions to the community. One morning a teacher was late in arriving to school so Ms. Corazón brought the students into her own classroom and provided them with books to read. As she engaged her students in a math problem one of the guests kept walking around the classroom and going to the door. After several attempts to curb this disruption she issued a consequence, just as respectfully as she did for her own students. She addressed him: "Excuse me sir. I still haven't gotten your name, but when [your teacher] returns, I'm going to get your name and I'm making a phone call to your parents." (observation, April 27, 2016).

Corrective measures. Ms. Corazón also described actions she and students collectively took to correct disruptions to their community. Immediately after one of my observations I made some reflective comments writing:

> As I entered the room a wall of frigid air nearly took my breath away. I was uncertain I could sit in there for the entire period and began silently panicking and wishing I had worn warmer clothing. (R. Rothrock, April 14, 2016).

Ms. Corazón commented on the extreme temperature saying it was supposed to be fixed last summer but that there were issues with contracts and communication. With frustration she said that if HMS were a more affluent school, the air conditioning would

have been fixed right away. Instead, now months later, one side of the building was an extreme cold and the other a sauna. She remarked that the classroom should be a safe space and that the temperatures were not conducive to that. In response to this interference, she stated that she was talking to her students about affecting change by writing letters to administrators about the unacceptable conditions.

As brought up earlier, Ms. Corazón also recognized externally-based interruptions to the class community. She recalled students' recognition that a more affluent school a few miles away had resources they did not. She addressed this by acknowledging the inequality:

> When I respond to those things, I have to be very careful that I don't make excuses for us, but I can't excuse the truth—that they do have things that we don't have. You have to recognize that truth and temper it with, 'yeah, they do have a lot of things that we don't have, however, we still work hard and we still lean on each other and help one another. And we try really hard, working to do our personal best.' … We have to really separate ourselves from another community. Not really reject it, but not focus on it. … As a teacher when you hear these things you can't dismiss that. You can't deny it, but you also have to train them to look at it and say okay, there is this disadvantage. There is this fact that I don't have theses things, but I'm not going to let that define me. And I'm going to have to rise above it. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In addition to acknowledging the reality, she sought to correct the issue within their class community by instilling confidence in her students and sharing her "capital" with them so that they could "rise above" the inequity. Surrounding the same event she described working to give students their own special "advantages" around testing, knowing their scores would be compared with the students from the more affluent school. She told her students "secret" strategies:

> ‘Spend ten minutes zenning and zoning and doing your multiplication charts and doing the deep breathing techniques that we’re practicing. You’re going to open up the neurons. You’re going to send enough oxygen and support your brain.’ … ‘you have to smile when you do it because there’s the research that says the brain connects to the facial muscles and then if you tell it everything’s okay, and if you’re breathing, then everything *is* okay.’ And so they’re practicing doing that now. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In acknowledging the external disruption (i.e. inequality of resources) and proposing to create special advantages for her students, she demonstrated her commitment to take action in order to keep her classroom community strong and mitigate any potential for dysfunction.

Learning to Be a Community

In line with efforts to facilitate community within her classroom, Ms. Corazón engaged students in learning how to be a community. She did this in two ways, through team building activities and challenging traditional, hierarchical models of power.

Team building. During our final interview, Ms. Corazón described a picture she had taken. The picture showed students working in a table group (i.e. university) to cut, assemble, and glue a chart. She explained saying that the activity had occurred at the beginning of the year and that she had deliberately used it to help students learn about how to work together in their university groups. She recalled her instructions:

> I remember teaching a procedure on [roles] and so they had to practice that procedure by doing this math activity. … I would always take it back to sports. ‘If you have a forward that’s trying to run back and defend the goal, that doesn’t make sense. Because if you pick the ball up, who’s going to be there to make it go?’ And most kids play soccer … so they understand that part—that you need to play your position. ‘If you don’t play your position, when the time comes that you need it, it’s going to be bad for your whole team.’ So they learned, something as a simple task, the

> interacting. They just had to glue something that they could reference later. This was a really good activity because it had a purpose to be able to look back on it, but it was also an easy way to practice how I expect things to look. … And I reminded them all year long. … So I'd say remember if you're the material manager—I would ask them to verbalize what their role is. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

Knowing many of her students played soccer, she drew on their wealth of knowledge and used a simple reinforcement activity to transfer the concept of teamwork to the classroom setting. Similarly, she described the spaghetti and marshmallow tower activity students did later in the year (see Image 5.2). She explained that students were given eighteen sticks of spaghetti, one large marshmallow, a yard of string, and a roll of masking tape. They were put in random groups and given eighteen minutes to create the tallest, freestanding tower they could. Ms. Corazón stated that she found the activity useful because, "it forces collaboration and communication and problem solving." (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Besides these one-time activities, Ms. Corazón also facilitated teamwork through activities that students engaged with on a more regular basis. One was an interactive, web-based activity called, "Kahoot." Students worked on teams to answer questions in Kahoots designed by Ms. Corazón. Points were awarded based on correct answering as well as speed. These results were then displayed on a leader board so everyone could receive immediate feedback on which concepts were mastered or still presented a struggled. Throughout these team competitions Ms. Corazón reminded students to work together, involving and utilizing everyone's strengths (e.g. one student writing out problems and one student answering the questions). This collaborative approach also

extended to worksheets and homework. Reinforcing students' collaboration, she awarded extra points to teams when all members completed a homework assignment. She commented that some students still resisted collaboration and shared her strategy to address this:

> I emphasize to them that, … 'if you know how to do something, … and you don't share that with your neighbor, is that making the world a better place? What does it hurt to share that? Right?' So most of them would. There were some that were reluctant. They're really, really competitive, and so I brought up the other part. 'The benefit is if you teach somebody something, you have to arrange something logically in your brain to explain it to your students. Then it actually makes you smarter. And it makes you an expert and even better at that concept when you share with someone else.' And that's where the turning point came for the really competitive, because half the class was ready to share, the other half was super competitive and only wanted the high scores. And that happens with gifted and talented. So getting them to buy in by increasing their own knowledge by sharing. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

While I have heard other teachers privilege and prize "gifted and talented" students, Ms. Corazón spent extra effort to help them move beyond a competitive focus and join the class community.

Supporting collaboration across the whole class, Ms. Corazón encouraged students to support each other across "universities." She clarified this dynamic stating:

> You're allowed to consult with somebody from another team, yet stay in your team. … Again, no one can be left out. So they can't leave their team, and go join another team. Because I don't want a kid to be left out and I don't want someone floundering. But if you're a team captain, you can have somebody talk to somebody from this other team. They can say, 'hey we're stuck on number 300. How did you do it?' It is the concept of college minded. And I tell them all the time, 'in college it's really cool. When you get homework in college you visit with your friends and do your homework together and you can share the answers and it's not cheating. So here isn't not cheating either. And I want you to do your

> homework together. I want you to Facebook each other and face time and whatever. Snapchat. Help each other with homework.' … I tell them, 'collaboration is good. I want you to collaborate, I want you to talk to your friends. But when it's time for testing we cannot make it collaborative. But here's the thing. If you collaborated well, then everyone on the team should do well.' (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

As portrayed here, the success of the class as a whole was positioned most important. She noted that individualized testing even became improved through teamwork. Moreover, Ms. Corazón used expectations of students' college attendance to foster excitement and confidence. While she did say that universities competed for points, she added this was done playfully and based solely on the groups' participation and attitude. She said any between-group competition was intended to provide a common goal to unite students rather than pit students against each other.

Through our conversations, Ms. Corazón shared one particular instance she was really proud of. The story illustrates, not only collaboration, but also the ideals and norms she sought to facilitate within her classes—that she and her students were in one "boat" together, interdependent and responsible to and for each other. In this instance, she had one class that was advanced and eligible to take the eighth-grade math STAAR. She proudly recounted:

> But this particular class … they had such a small timeframe to reach a big goal—to be able to take an eighth-grade level class and be tested on it in March and have one chance. They don't get to retake it like the eighth graders get to retake it up to two times. My seventh graders get one shot. That's it. … There were five of them who are struggling really badly. … I was told to kick them out. They were performing so poorly on eighth-grade level material that I was told they're not going to pass, we need to get them out of the classroom. And I didn't. I was the only teacher who didn't take kids out of the advanced class. The other teachers, they got rid of a bunch of kids. I kept 100% of my kids and at the end, I told them the

> story. I said, 'did you know that I was told to get rid of some you because you wouldn't make it?' And they were like, 'really? Who was it? Who was it?' And I was like, 'it doesn't matter. Who's still here? We're all still here. We're all in this boat, and we all stayed in the same boat together. And we helped each other to grow, and y'all taught each other.' I didn't tell them who it was, but those bottom five kids all passed. Which is kind of crazy because there were some of them, the ones that were kind of in the middle, that didn't pass. I didn't say anything about that. And the kids that were always at the top, those did pass. And one of my kids performed better than most of the eighth graders. He got the academic recognition. … So the bottom five kids passing … that's a testament. I didn't boot anyone off of our boat …. I never told them that some of them were supposed to be booted off [before the test]. Because that kind of pressure would have been unimaginable and really unfair to my kids. Very disrespectful to them. So I kept that to myself, but I had to share with them at the end. Because when I saw that the five kids passed, I was floored. … And I'll say this, there were three kids that missed it by one or two questions. … So they were really just a few answers away from passing, which that would've been closer to 95% of kids passing. … None of them missed it really bad. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, July 21, 2016)

Throughout her telling of this story, Ms. Corazón beamed with pride for her students. I saved this story until this point because I felt it strongly demonstrates the application of all the efforts I have described concerning how she sought to construct a community within her classroom through the characteristics of interdependence, respect and honoring, and high expectations.

Repositioning roles. The second way I found Ms. Corazón's teaching practices facilitated students' learning to be a community was through the ways she positioned students. She privileged students' cultural knowledge as useful and important in the classroom, integrating multiple cultural references to help students learn math methods. For instance, I regularly heard her remind students to "lace the football," or do the "whip and nae nae" (a song with dance moves students were familiar with). She also used sport

analogies (e.g. the previous soccer example) and paralleled her seventh graders and math, saying both where all about relationships.

In addition to privileging her students' knowledge and connecting her teaching and class material to their lives, Ms. Corazón also positioned them as teachers. She shared that at least a few times a week she created space for a "guest teacher." She explained this role saying:

> When someone wants to show that they understood the concept, they can get up and be the guest teacher … And it's this really cute community. … I have kids that say, 'can a friend come with me?' to support them. And it doesn't have to be someone from their team. Like, their friend will come from another university and will come and stand with them, … Because when you're up there, … you forget everything and nothing makes sense. So they like to call for support. (Ms. Corazón, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

This role of guest teacher was given a special place. Students moved to the front of the classroom to use the document camera to have their work projected on a large screen for all to see.

Ms. Corazón also interrupted traditional, power structuring of herself as the expert, giver of knowledge, and students as receivers. I observed an overall flexibility and fluidity in roles. She described an instance of this when her students took it upon themselves to "school" her (i.e. impart their knowledge to her) which then granted her with more cultural insight that she could use in her teaching. She chuckled as she recalled that recently her students had matter-of-factly informed her that Twitter was no longer considered "cool." In Ms. Corazón's classroom, then, all community members (i.e. students and teacher) participated in a variety of roles, including leadership (e.g. guest

teachers or university captains), all received respect and were equally valued, and all were expected to be responsible and accountable for the community's well-being.

Showing acceptance of these repositioned roles, I observed that students assumed ownership of the classroom in some of their actions. Students demonstrated enthusiasm through participation in singing or movements and clapped to honor each other without prompting. I also witnessed students assume community leadership in small instances, such as hurrying Ms. Corazón to begin a Kahoot challenge, telling Ms. Corazón she should drink some water to help her sore throat, and turning off the classroom timer when it went off. Beyond this, students participated in addressing community disruptions. As an example, some students from another class were visiting and talking loudly amongst themselves. Ms. Corazón's students asked them to be quiet. Finally, I observed the students' confidence as equal members of their community through their playfulness and joking with each other and Ms. Corazón. In one instance, she had instructed students to get out their cell phones and log in to a Kahoot. Mischievously, one of the students responded that his phone was low on battery, only having 92 percent left. As Ms. Corazón began considering another arrangement, she caught on and the class laughed at his joke.

SUMMARY

In speaking to community generally, Ms. Corazón's detailed explanations, examples, and analogies indicate that communities exist as groupings of people, with

sizing varying from two to all of humanity, based on a shared commonality, and that communities must be interdependent and uphold norms in order to function well and weather internal disruptions. Also implicit in her conceptions were recognitions of power and the potential for negative communities.

Students' communities were conceptualized in much the same way communities were more generally presented. Spanning scalar (i.e. micro to macro) levels, Ms. Corazón described communities as small as families to those existing across national, politically-imposed borders (e.g. students' ties to Latin America or the global commonality of gender). Though communities both inside and outside of the school were described, most present was a focus on HMS and her class community. This was highlighted through her photographs. In addition to scale, she also recognized that some communities existed across time (e.g. previous and future school communities). She also understood students as involved in a complex interweaving and layering of communities. The characteristics identified (i.e. commonality, interdependence, dissonance, and resistance) largely paralleled the characteristics of her general notions of community. One exception was that student identity as a commonality and, thus, foundation for community was emphasized. Another was that while conceptions of resistance were presented, norms were less so. These descriptions of resistance, coupled with students' taking ownership and leadership in their class community positioned students as abled, autonomous, contributing members of their communities. Taken together, student communities were complex, layering across space and time, agentic entities characterized by positive attributes, such as flexibility, support, specialized skills, and resourcefulness.

In relation to these conceptions, Ms. Corazón felt strongly connected to her students' communities. Since the communities she described were primarily centered on the school, though also including families and identity, it is to these communities she conveyed being a part of. She did not demonstrate a significant focus on or connection to geographic-based communities, perhaps due to it being her first year teaching and her residence being far away. However, as noted in the previous chapter (see Figure 4.3), she did live in an area of Austin (i.e. Southeast) historically inhabited by Latina/o families—a result of segregationist practices. This, along with her identity of a being a Mexican American may have supported her connection with her students' ethnic identities despite the geographic distance between where she lived and the school. Also supporting her sense of belonging, she described deliberate actions to connect with her students and their families. Even in her first year at HMS, then, she believed she was interwoven into her students' communities. She connected this community membership with what happened in her classroom.

Within the classroom, Ms. Corazón viewed her students and herself as a community and worked to construct her classes as such through her teaching approaches. Moreover, she actively worked to maintain the health and strength of the communities wanting it to be a home-like space, respectful and safe (i.e. free of personal attacks and violence in which everyone was honored, valued, and no one was left behind). Toward these ends, norms were developed, including notions of teamwork and high academic-centered expectations for participation and ownership. All community members, including Ms. Corazón herself, were held accountable to the class community's norms

through natural consequences and actions taken to correct conflicts or disruptions. Corresponding with her facilitation of norms, Ms. Corazón also worked to help students learn how to be a class community through team building activities utilizing "university" groupings, and through the repositioning of roles (e.g. students as leaders and teachers). In considering all these aspects of her classroom teaching practices, I have developed an illustration to visually incorporate and convey how community is present in Ms. Corazón's classroom (see Figure 5.2).

Chapter 6: Mrs. García

In this chapter, I present the second of three in-depth accountings of one of my cases—Mrs. García. In line with the previous chapter, this one is broken into two main sections: 1. Mrs. García's conceptions of community, including how she described her students' communities and herself in relation to them, and 2. how community existed within her classroom.

PART ONE: CONCEPTIONS OF "COMMUNITY"

Unlike Ms. Corazón, who spent a good deal of time considering community in more general ways, most of Mrs. García's descriptions specifically related to the school and students. For this reason, I present only a few thoughts on her general conceptions of community and then turn to explanation of the notion as it relates to the school and students' communities.

What is a Community?

As I asked Mrs. García what came to mind when she thought about community, she offered several examples. Starting at the micro level of family, she quickly broadened her examples, suggesting Austin, politically-based groups, worldwide communities (e.g. music-based), and humanity as examples of communities.

Speaking of these examples, Mrs. García's conversations revealed some characteristics she found important for communities: commonality, support, and interaction. Conveying that communities are made up of people who share a commonality she explained, "People that maybe share similar backgrounds. People that share similar hopes and dreams." (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016). One specific commonality she highlighted, was geography. She stated, "The community is where you live" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016). In addition to the importance of a commonality bringing people together, she also noted that "support" is a key aspect—one she felt was particularly emphasized through a family "community." This is expanded upon in the next section through her continued conversations.

A third characteristic brought up was that communities interact with each other. Mrs. García's comments brought attention to the existence of communities at various scalar levels (e.g. local or international), as well as the ability for people to belong to multiple, overlapping communities, creating a nesting of communities across these levels. She explained, "I think it can be done at different levels. You can say we're part of the human community, and then you're part of the Austin community. So it just depends what you're talking about" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016). Revealing another interaction, she noted how Austin, known as the music capital of the world, has it's own unique music community while also connected to various musicians groups worldwide. Finally, expanding on her understandings about interaction, she

brought up a characteristic of tension or conflict that can sometimes exist. She drew on geographic and socioeconomic dynamics of Austin as an example of this, stating:

> This area, it's very contradictory. … There are theses two communities just kind of living in unison, in the same place, in the same neighborhood. It's like, if you go west, past Mopac, you know what you're going to find. Very affluent. Everybody's pretty much the same. And [more central] I think you have middle class people—young professionals that live in the neighborhood … When you cross the tracks [southeast of HMS], … you find a lot of nice homes. And if you go straight [to the north] … it's bad, you know that area. … I don't think those communities mix unfortunately. I think they live within a mile from each other. Two miles. But I really don't think that—you know, they're over there in the poverty and these are over there making $50,000 or $70,000 and I'm not sure that they come together. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Using knowledge of Austin's residential and economic segregation patterns, Mrs. García recognized a different form of interaction—an unnatural lack of interaction. Communities that could exist as overlapping or as one, united through a commonality of geography, were not only distinct but appeared, to her, to not interact at all. Though Mrs. García's general descriptions of community were brief, her identification of characteristics, including people, commonality, and interactions, demonstrated some depth and complexity.

Community Within a School Context. Recognizing my interest in the classroom context, Mrs. García quickly moved from talking about community more generally, to speaking of the notion within the context of the school. Drawing on her experiences, and in line with her initial comments, she broadly defined communities as groups of people. She shared about one of her class' lessons and how it related saying, "they do a chapter on anthropology and we talk about culture and the thing that comes up is groups. We're

all part of one group. And that is community" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016). In a later interview she referred back to this chapter and added examples saying, "[My students] learn about groups. Which is community—small communities. Friends are your communities—a small group—your church friends and your school friends and then your neighborhood friends. And then the family is a group" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

Beyond describing community as a grouping of people, Mrs. García offered thoughts on school communities that I have identified as 1. characteristics that support a strong, positive school community and 2. negative characteristics that can be detrimental to a school community.

Strengthening Characteristics. Mrs. García shared several characteristics that she felt strengthened a community; these included: care, support, relationship building, and leadership. All were action-based and carried out within a community, between members.

A notion of "care," was the first characteristic Mrs. García shared, however she held reservation as to what this meant. She reasoned:

> I was going to start by saying, well that you care. A requirement [of being part of our community] would be that you care for our community. But at the same time, I'm not even sure. There are people that are in the community that have two jobs, that are left out of the political system because of the lack of language or resources or whatever, but are part of the community simply because they live there. … They are members of the community, but I'm not sure that they participate or do a lot of stuff or are helping the community. … I'm sure these people care, but how do they show it? … Because caring is one thing, but not doing something about it, do you really care? (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

As stated, she found care to be a key component, but more than this, Mrs. García described care in a more active, rather than simply an affective, sense. That is, she felt people that *really* cared about their community, *showed* they cared. Thinking further about the dynamics of some families, she described the importance of community members taking care of each other—again, an active form of caring. She shared her experiences with HMS families: "When one of their family members … lose their job, … they're gonna take care of rent for that person. Or somebody is sick and they're going to cook and take the food to that person" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

Mrs. García also drew on her understandings of family to describe how community is strengthened through a foundation of support or unity. Similar to the previous characteristic of care, she also conveyed support as action-based. She shared a story about how she had stuck up for one of her students saying:

> The principal came to my room and said, 'I need to speak to Mateo [pseudonym].' I said, 'what did he do?' and he said, 'Mrs. García, this is…' and I said, 'no, you don't understand. I need to know. This is the boy who comes and does this gardening and stuff without getting any credit without hearing even a thank you.' And he said, 'well he drove to school today.' He drove his father's truck because he overslept. He went and worked really hard on Saturday and Sunday so he overslept. So he called his dad and he said would be late for school, so instead his dad said he could take the truck. So he went and parked in the teachers' parking lot and a teacher that was coming in late ratted on him. You know? And so I was like, 'he didn't want to be late to school!' But then I went in and I said, 'Mateo, you drove the truck? Mateo, you know you're not supposed to do that.' And I told [the principal], 'don't suspend him.' I mean his father was also guilty. So I interfere. I put my neck out there for him.

Continuing, she described this type of active support for other students. She said she worked to protect them from discipline when they had to defend themselves in fights:

> And it's like I tell [students], 'if somebody is messing with you, you come and tell me. I will email the counselor, I will email the assistant principal and then if things come to the point where you have to defend yourself, there's already a record—that we have not protected you. So you need to protect yourself. And trust me, I will go to bat with you if they're trying to suspend you.' And kids do that. … I think there is that community. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

Through these stories, Mrs. García described the accountability she felt to a community she felt part of. As a result, she shared her willingness to "stick her neck out," and "go to bat" for students—members of her community. For her, then, a commitment to support her community led to an active participation in the protection and well-being of community members.

Relationship building between community members was also an important action that Mrs. García identified for maintaining a strong community. She drew on her experiences at a previous school and how the school, led by the principal, put on events for the school's community—i.e. students and their families. One such event was a Thanksgiving dinner in which, she said, 350 people, including students' parents and grandparents came to participate. She also described how the school hosted a huge fall festival for the community. She recalled the principal going to great lengths to foster participation among the teachers for events like these so that school personnel could serve and interact with their students and their families outside of the classroom, building

relationships. Related to these experiences, Mrs. García also remembered a conversation she had with a former principal about relationship building:

> [A former principal] said, 'you know I have to be honest. I really have this jealousy, this envy. I have been in the office when we have events and the parents will come up and hug you rather than to say hello to me.' … And I'm like, 'I've earned it. It didn't happen overnight. … Because I taught their other kids or their cousins or their—you know. And they knock on my door and hand me a letter they don't understand and say can you translate it and I'll translate it.' … The ladies in the PTA, … they're all Mexican. One came to me and she needed a letter for something. … I said, 'I can type you up a letter really fast.' And she said, '¿oh sí?' And I said, 'sure.' (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

Here, Ms. García shared two examples beyond participating in community events. She described how longevity—staying at a school for several years—became a relational activity as she taught multiple family members. The second example connected back to her thoughts on support. She shared how her supportive action (i.e. translation), served to build relationship within her school community as well. Finally, connecting the encounter back to relationship building through events, she said she suggested her former principal attend the students' soccer games, adding, "She made it to the next game. And then the kids … and the parents were coming up to her, and I said, 'how did that feel? They notice that you are here. So they notice when you're not.'" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016). For Mrs. García, all of these actions involving interpersonal interactions served to build and support a positive school community.

Finally, leadership came up in our conversation. Mrs. García conveyed how leadership is key to maintaining and growing a healthy community. Returning to her

example of school events, she described the role her former principal played in building their school community:

> So some people don't want to be a part of the community. If you look at it that way, you can't force people to be a part. And it takes a very special leader to grow the community too. To grow it takes somebody who knows. [My previous principal] just had this way with words. That she would just, make you feel like you have to do this. But she's not forcing you to do it, but you have to do it. … She made you feel welcome. Like, 'thank you,' and she listed all the people that had shown up to a particular event. And she wasn't telling the other ones, 'and these are the lazy asses that didn't show up.' But guess what, if your name was not on that list we knew you were one of those lazy asses that didn't show up …. So [we had that] sense of, because [she worked] as hard … we felt like we had to work as hard. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

Leadership, in this example, supported community by both calling other members to action and by serving as a model. Conversely, she also stated that not having this kind of leadership led to instability, inconsistency, lack of commitment, and was overall, bad for the school community. She remarked that at HMS, principals only stayed for two or three years at most. This seemed a source of deep concern for her as it came up repeatedly. She asked, "Can they not hire … someone that says, 'this is our community, these are our kids?' … Can [that principal] be at the school for five years?" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Negative Characteristics. Building upon her conceptions of a fluid school community—one that could be influenced in positive or negative ways—Mrs. García shared some factors that could be detrimental to the community or lead to a sort of pseudo community. These factors included: superficial use of the term, appropriation of

membership status, part-time members, exclusiveness, inequity across communities, and fragmentation within a community.

Mrs. García was quick to point out how the term, "community," itself can be problematic. Adamant that people should consider what the word means and not just casually throw it around, she stated that she had thought and talked about this with people in the past. She explained:

> It's a catchy word and it gets thrown around and the same thing with the whole family thing. Well okay if we, [HMS], are a family, you need to address the fact that we are a dysfunctional family. … Don't throw these words to make it seem like we're working in a super wonderful environment just because you state that we are family. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

Venting her frustration with perceived superficial or inaccurate use of terminology, she conveyed that this kind of use serves as a smokescreen, covering the reality of a struggling school campus.

Assuming community member status was also brought up. Mrs. García described how someone connected with the school might expect or claim a status that was not truly theirs:

> I think we discussed … how people can just use [community] as a politically correct type of thing. [They] really aren't part of the community. You go to work at school and then leave to the opposite side of town. You don't really mingle with the people. I mean … you can feel like it's a low-income community, 'we can help them do this,' but you're doing it from the outside. It's different, I think, when you share it. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

Laced with nuances, this statement implicitly revealed some understandings of positions and power around community. That is, someone could exist "outside" of a community

and yet still feel able (and have the power) to assume some ownership and exert influence (i.e. save) upon it. Geography and relationships were also brought up in the comment, suggesting that the amount of time spent in an area and interacting with true community members matters. An inverse example from the positive characteristics she reported, this suggests that pseudo community members (i.e. those who have assumed or appropriated their status) are antithetical to other members.

Similarly, Mrs. García described the destructive quality of someone (e.g. a teacher or administrator) being minimally or only partially involved, assuming a sort of part-time community member role. She described observing teachers having a sense of being "done" and felt they did not *truly* want to be a part of their school's community. However, she also realized teachers' desire for the benefits of being a part of the school community. She shared this conflict:

> For example, just being about the school, it's almost like a part-time community. I think [teachers] have the misconception of what community is. Just because you work at school—if you got in there at 7:45, you put in your hours, you work hard for the kids—but at the end of the day you leave that community, you go home to another community of your own. … Can you be a part of two communities? I'm sure you can, but. … Kids are really smart. Kids can really see through people and you could be talking to the kids and sometimes you go, why aren't they getting me? Why aren't I reaching them? And sometimes you're trying to be the community but then you're really not. And they see that. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

In this comment Mrs. García's suggested that simply being at the school during school hours was not enough to gain community membership. However, she found that teachers wanted to be able to cash in on membership status to "reach" their students, presenting a quandary for the teachers.

Mrs. García also related how people could be excluded *within* communities, despite holding membership status. This was the result of asymmetrical power within a community, causing levels of membership to exist. She offered examples of how some members (i.e. parents and teachers) were excluded by not feeling listened to or valued. Recognizing that teachers generally don't enjoy attending meetings, she explained that it wasn't the meeting itself, but rather the structure—teachers being talked to rather than being welcomed into a conversation. She said, "I don't mind an hour meeting if you're listening to us. Because we are your community of teachers, you need to be listening to us" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016). Similarly, she noted how parents were considered part of the school community, but were expected to only participate in specific ways. She described the excluding practice of asking parents to attend events only to have them sign in so the numbers could be shown to the superintendent. She further described the limited member role that parents were expected to abide within by sharing expectations that some teachers held:

> [Teachers] seem to complain a lot about the lack of parental support … Or, 'oh my God this mother came to complain.' That's parental support! Parental support doesn't mean give us $10 when we need, or come to this event when they feel no connection. When they come and question their child's teacher, 'why isn't there any homework?' that's advocating for their kid. So sometimes you get that constant, 'the parents don't care, the parents don't care.' A very big disconnect you hear and see a lot. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

By being allowed to engaged in only certain action or participation within the school community, then, teachers' and parents' experienced a form or exclusion within the community.

Another negative characteristic was inequity *across* communities. Mrs. García gave examples of other, more privileged, communities overlapping the school's community and gaining benefit, but without seeming to offer any significant contribution. At one edge of HMS's campus a track had been built for Austin's Capital Metro Rail. This rail became a part of the school community in negative ways as Mrs. García described students playing "chicken" with the train and putting coins on the track. They did not benefit from use of the rail, though, as the transport merely cut through the school's community without stopping. Another example was a recently built YMCA located within the school's attendance zone that did not seem to serve the area's population. Mrs. García described this:

> It's mostly used by Anglo people. I don't know why. There's the gardens behind there. They have the community gardens. … I think you might have to work with the YMCA and you might have to pay a price or something. (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016)

These examples point to more privileged (both economically and racially) communities' use of space within HMS's community without benefiting the school community. This appropriation, consistent with gentrification efforts of the area, reveals a negative aspect of community.

Lastly, Mrs. García presented understandings, that I have termed "fragmentation," occurring within a school community. She described the school community as being disjointed through both a physical separation and conflict between community members. Physically, she described the campus layout, pointing to how the portables existed outside of the main school building. This created a sense of separation and lack of

regulation (e.g. students could come and go more easily). She also described a disconnect she felt between herself and others within the school saying, "some people are not part of my family at this campus. I don't want to hang out with these people. I don't want to be around them, they're very toxic. They're not a part of my family" (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016). Similarly, she spoke of the distress she and other teachers felt when, halfway into the spring semester, the principal removed the school's dress code and allowed cell phone use in hallways. She recalled this saying:

> "That makes me a little strange about the sense of our school community. Because if you are a part of our community you are to be here for our community. We should be able to have that real feeling. … So just because you're saying the word 'community,' and just because you're saying you're part of this community, [doesn't mean you are]." (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

This spatial separation, as well conflict between people within the community, then, present an element of fragmentation, disrupting the health and functioning of the community.

Students' Communities

In speaking to the concept of "community" within the context of schooling, students' communities have already been implicitly considered. However, as I asked Mrs. García about her students' communities more specifically, she offered many examples.

Specific Communities. As with her initial examples of community, she began at the micro level and described family, then geographic communities, such as neighborhoods and zip code areas. She also described schools as students' community and extended this to schools past and present (i.e. past elementary school, current middle

school, and future high school). These vertical education paths, then, became the commonality for community formation among students. She also described groups of friends, both within the school and outside of it, and religious groups as communities. Mrs. García recognized HMS as a community the students belonged to (centering the school in her mapping of students' communities), as well as several other smaller communities within or connected to the school. Privileging the school context, she described her students' communities as built around commonalities of athleticism (e.g. soccer teams), demographics (e.g. nationality, immigration status), language (e.g. native Spanish speakers, ESL designation), club membership (e.g. Green Club, Student Advisory Council, Student Council), and participation in events (e.g. beautification projects).

Specific Communities in Photography. Mrs. García's photos offered many examples of what she perceived to be the students' communities. Overall, the photographs she took showed her students' communities as geographically centered and inclusive of infrastructure, landscape, residences, and businesses. In our final meeting she sorted through the photographs and ordered them in a deliberate sequence that began with a picture of the school's initials on a wall of the building. From here the sequence visited her portable classroom, moved around the school, expanded to some show some streets, businesses, and the high school her students would attend, and, finally, ended at her own home—also the end of HMS's attendance zone.

Mrs. García said would have taken pictures of her classroom but that by the time she began taking the photography her classroom was boxed up because she was being

moved to another location in the school. What she did capture was the outside area of the portable including plants and sidewalks (Images 6.1 and 6.2). Describing an image that looked out to the street she stated, "To me … that is where we are housed. At the corner of [two named streets]. And this is the common grounds for the students" (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016). Moving from the portables, she documented the busses at the loading zone. She felt this represented the many geographic locations of the students' communities. Mrs. García also took images showing the edges of campus and the entrance—including pathways and gardens that she explained were kept up by students, parents, and teachers (Image 6.3). Of particular significance was the "mother tree," a big oak tree at the entrance of the school. She reminisced:

> This tree, it's, because so many members of our community have worked on this particular area, from one beautification event to the other. … When I came to apply at [HMS] I was like, 'wow,' at how beautiful this area was. (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016)

Continuing, the photographs showed outdoor sports areas (Image 6.4), the Capital Metro Rail track (Image 6.5), and animal pens that were recently built. Taking scarcely any images inside the school—perhaps portraying a sense of fragmentation or disunity within school—her photography only showed the "400" hallway.

Following the photographically-documented journey, pictures of businesses, residences, and other schools and institutions moved outward from HMS's campus. Businesses included a theater, a local panaderia and restaurant, a local woman selling food out of the back of her van in a shopping center parking lot (Image 6.6), grocery stores (Image 6.7), an event center, and shops (Image 6.8), including a Target and

Salvation Army store. As she sifted through the photographs she remarked, "You know, where you spend your time, where you drop your dollars, that is part of community" (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016). In addition to these businesses, she also took pictures of the elementary school most of her students attended, the high school most would attend, a college campus sign, and a YMCA. Capturing some residences of her students, Mrs. García also took pictures of apartments, duplexes, a single-family home, and ended with her own home (Image 6.9).

Characteristics of the Communities. Relating to her general comments about community as well as to those within the context of schooling, Ms. García's examples and descriptions of her students' communities brought up qualities that overlapped. Within her initial discussion of the notion of "community," she mentioned the need for a commonality (i.e. a unifying factor bringing a group of people together) and interaction between communities. Considering the school community she focused on factors that could positively or negatively impact the community. Merging these, the characteristics of communities her students belonged to can be grouped as: 1. a commonality, 2. the existence of negative characteristics, and 3. interaction between communities.

Commonality. In each of Mrs. García's examples of a student community, there was some commonality present. These included geography, identity, language, and purpose.

A recurring, defining feature of many of the student communities was geography. During our conversations and through her photography, Mrs. García consistently brought

attention to the area defined as HMS's attendance zone. She described this particular geography saying:

> In relation to what your work is, I think it's probably the community that makes up your school—your population. So in this case I think that community could be defined as the demographics, the areas that the students come from. Our children don't come from West Austin. So when you talk community, our school, and how you identify that community, it would be the kids that live between [four major roads]. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

As discussed in her preliminary statements about community, she maintained the notion that community is a group of people, unified through by a common factor. Here she noted that a school's population was connected through geography—HMS's attendance zone.

In addition to geography, Mrs. García brought attention to identity. She mentioned that students sometimes identify themselves by the zip code they live within. Also recognizing school affiliation (and showing this in her mapping) she shared that students identify as coming from a specific elementary school or moving up to a particular high school. She said:

> There's always a connection of where you go from here. 'Where do I expect to see you? I expect to see you at [a specific high school].' So there's that continuation, that progression. Like I said, most of them came from [a specific elementary school]. … So you can see the path that the students take …. And the kids themselves, what did they identify with? Oh I went to … so-and-so school before coming here. (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016)

Beyond identifying through geography and institution, she also mentioned income-level status (i.e. low-income) and immigration status (i.e. first-generation immigrant).

Connected to identity, Mrs. García gave a great deal of attention to language and the significant role it could play in bringing students together. She described this bonding saying:

> What unifies a culture, a community is language. Language unifies. And with our school being, what? Probably 80 percent Hispanic? … It would be not only bilingual, but sometimes what defines them is the lack of English. That's a community of it's own. So it's sort of a sub community of that geographical community" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

As noted here, Mrs. García recognized that in addition to sharing a language, lack of fluency in a language brought students together. Specifically, she mentioned ESL students as a community.

Another factor that Mrs. García felt served to create community among students was shared purpose. She described students working together toward a goal, such as cleaning up and "beautifying" HMS's campus at a special Saturday event. Her examples of clubs, sports teams, and music groups also showed connection through a goal. Each community had a common purpose that led to student actions (e.g. meeting together, practices) in order to accomplish it.

Negative Characteristics. As with her descriptions of the school community, I also found Mrs. García recognized some negative aspects of her students' communities. She mentioned alienation or exclusion of some students as well as fragmentation within a student community.

As Mrs. García described language and immigrant communities, she noted how some felt marginalized within the school. She stated that immigrant and ESL students

often felt like outsiders: “Some of [our ESL students] don’t feel like they are really a part of [HMS] as a whole. Sometimes, like even today … they feel alienated and like they are the last ones that are thought about” (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016). Explaining how these feelings may have arisen, Mrs. García described a superficial or partial inclusion within the school:

> I know some people are going to feel like no, that’s not true [that ESL students are excluded]. Because we have a program for them or we have people next door that will help them or we try to do things bilingually, send the information that goes out bilingually. But I’m not really sure that anybody really approaches these kids and asks what you think, how do you feel. For example, the principal started this initiative, which is really cool and I like it, but it was a student advisory council … [and he included] kids that are really in trouble a lot. … The kiddos [who] are making the straight A’s, who are really working harder, sometimes they get ignored. … Did anyone ask the ESL kids if they wanted to be a part of that? … So I really don’t think that the ESL, the immigrants, feel like they are part of the community.” (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

In addition to this marginalization within the school, among students who had migrated from Central and South America, she found that Hondurans often felt like outsiders within this group.

Beyond exclusion, Mrs. García also related how the student population was fragmented. Though in the past ESL had been included within classrooms, at the time of our meeting ESL students were isolated to separate classrooms. Though common, another separation occurred as a result of separate spaces for grade levels. Mrs. García described how hallways were designated for certain grades and that the portables were for sixth graders—although she had multiple grade-levels and her classroom was in a portable. This resulted in minimal mixing across grades. At a larger scale, she mentioned

dispersed student residences and demonstrated this in her mapping. Explaining how this came to be, she remarked that a highway east of the school forced students living west of it to attend HMS, despite living closer to another middle school. She stated:

> So the kids come to us by bus, yet right there [next to their homes] you have [another middle school]. These kids are so close, but they can't go there. There's something about a rule that if it's an interstate highway the kids cannot cross, but they are under the two mile radius. So they would have to walk, they cannot be bused. But they're not allowed to walk. So the kids from all the way over there, they come here. (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016)

All of this served to cause some fragmentation among the student population, potentially creating a less cohesive and unified student body.

Interaction of Communities. Mrs. García's comments about her students' communities also revealed a characteristic of interaction between them. Though I have highlighted this here with a distinct section, I have discussed some of these interactions in previous sections.

Communities can interact in a variety of ways; one was across time. That is, a past, present, and future school attended become connected. Mrs. García also described communities as nested, stating that language created a "sub" community within a geographically-based community. Beyond these interactions, Mrs. García also described temporary connections. Pointing to beautification events, she said multiple communities came together to clean and plant on HMS's campus. These included HMS's Student Council, the Green Club from the high school aligned with HMS, and the North Austin Neighborhood Association.

Within her descriptions of negative characteristics, Mrs. García also alluded to a different form of interaction. She described groups being excluded or alienated, pushed to the outer edges of communities. She brought up fragmentation and the separation of communities through school layout and policies. As explored in her general understandings, students' communities also seemed to experience an alternative form of interaction through efforts that reduced interaction.

Ms. García's Sense of Self in Relation to Students' Communities

Midway through our conversations together, I asked Mrs. García if she felt like she was a part of her students' communities. She responded:

> I feel like I may be a little bit better than some people, but still probably should not say I'm a part of their community. I mean, I am invited to graduations, their quinceañeras. … The fact that I'm still in touch with them. … I have students that will come and help me on a Saturday with the gardening at the school. I think that's community. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016).

She continued to explain her connection with past students and how she kept in touch with them. Despite this she was initially hesitant to assume full community membership status. However, in our final meeting she said that as she continued thinking about it, she realized she *was* very much part of her students' communities. In taking the pictures, she realized she shared many connections including geography, businesses, schools, activities, and events. She related:

> I do feel like I am part of their community. This is the first conversation that you and I had. Are you a part of their community? … I didn't see a personal connection to [the elementary school most HMS students attend] … To [the aligned high school], there was [a connection] because I started my career there. … I drive by there and I see my students and I'm honking at them …. Everything else, I pretty much connected with it. … The

> movie theater, I happened to be there and I had the camera and I thought, … they go to my same theater. (Mrs. García, personal communication, June 22, 2016)

In the end, then, Mrs. García included herself as a part of her students' communities because she shared multiple commonalities with them.

Being Part of Her Students' Communities. Throughout our conversations, Mrs. García described efforts that allowed her to connect with her students, engage parents, and support the larger school community.

Connecting With Students. Sharing multiple ways she engaged with students beyond the classroom, Mrs. García mentioned having similar experiences, sharing language, resisting regulations, mothering, and participating in extracurricular clubs and events.

Mrs. García described how some life experiences and day-to-day activities allowed her to relate with her students. As an immigrant, she felt a strong connection with immigrant students. Another shared experience was residence. She said she had lived in an apartment complex that some of her students now lived in. She also stated that she shopped at the same stores as her students and had taught at the high school most of her students would end up attending. All of these similar experiences, then, fostered a connection between her and her students.

Language was a significant factor that Mrs. García felt brought closeness. She recalled:

> [At another school] I had seven languages in my classroom. So you kind of try to learn a little bit from your students. Like I started singing silent night in Korean … And my Korean students were like oh! … And it's just

> really cool when you can share language with your students. Same thing with Arab kids. It's like the recent immigrants, they don't know the rules at all. … [One student had] been going [to school here] four days. And I said what happened? And he said, 'push.' So I said 'Do you speak Arabic?' [in Arabic] And he goes, 'yeaaaaah' and he's like 'lululululu' [a babbling sound] and I'm like, 'stop!' I don't know that much. But then he smiles. Immediately there's a connection and they know me from then on. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Feeling language was a significant commonality through which a community could be formed, her fluency in multiple languages, then, offered a connection to students and their communities.

Another way Mrs. García actively engaged with students was through resisting regulations. She mentioned giving rides to students and that she gave her phone number to some students. Describing her ride giving as a form of "care," she offered one scenario in which she would bend the rules for the wellbeing of her students:

> The other day I took five boys [home] because they get beat up on the way home on a regular basis. And the word was that [some other students] were gonna 'kick your ass over there by the target.' I took them all home. Well you know you're not supposed to give them rides. … Well I did. And they were thankful. And they respect me for it. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

In addition to offering rides to students, she gave out her phone number to some students on occasion, such as when a student wanted to come help over spring break. Though unsanctioned, these actions represented another way she engaged with students outside of the classroom.

Mothering, through advice, accountability, and protection, was another form of interaction Mrs. García had with her students. She related how she checked her students' grades in other classes and reported to their parents if they were failing:

> I tell my kids, 'I'm a big chismosa [gossip]. I told your mom you're flunking in four classes.' And they're like, 'why?' And I say, 'only because I care about you. And the other teachers are not calling. So I tell them. So expect to give up your phone when you get home, or whatever.' And they're like, 'o-kay [said in a deep, exaggerated voice].' (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

In addition to this accountability, she also pushed students to set their sights higher. She shared an example: "'We already have too many dish washers. We want to own the restaurant, not work in it.' I always tell them that" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016). Beyond this she also mothered through looking after her students well being. She got involved if students were getting picked on (e.g. giving rides) and worked to make sure students needs were met, such as buying tennis shoes for a student so he could play soccer. Her concern for the students' success and well being resulted in actions and interactions akin to what Dixson and Dingus (2008) have termed "other mothering."

Involved in extracurricular activities, Mrs. García also supported clubs and attended events. She sponsored HMS's Student Council and participated with other clubs, such as the Green Club. She also attended events, including sports matches, and beautification days.

As a result of her efforts and involvement, Mrs. García described that deep and long-lasting relationships with her students were formed. She stated that former students would regularly come and visit her or participate, at her invitation, in beautification events. This was substantiated when, during out final meeting together, a student unexpectedly came to visit her.

Engaging With Parents. Mrs. García stated that she liked to "set roots" and stay at a school for an extended amount of time because it allowed her to build relationships with parents and families. This statement was supported through several actions she engaged in. These included communication, mentorship, support, and attending events.

As already shared, Mrs. García communicated with parents about their students' grades. Her deliberate efforts to support parents through communication came up repeatedly. She shared an important element to this communication saying that, "you have to listen." She continued:

> You know I love to talk by now I cannot have a five-minute conversation with parents. I've been on the phone with a parent for an hour. Because you have to sit there and listen to their story and where they're coming from. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Through these extended conversations, she described taking up a mentoring role with some parents. She said she would challenge parents to maintain an expectation that their child do well in school. In doing this she remarked that being a parent herself, allowed her to align herself with parents and that her 30 years of experience gave her a special position from which to speak from.

Other forms of engagement with parents included support and family event attendance. Mrs. García shared that she would sometimes tell a student that his or her mom was "right," and that the student should listen to her. She also made herself available to parents to translate or write letters for them. As a result of her connections with parents and students, she would be invited to family functions. Her attendance of such events as quinceañeras, then, offered a further way for her to engage with parents.

Connecting to the Larger School Community. Though to a lesser extent, Mrs. García's comments also demonstrated some active ways she worked to support and connect to the school. In addition to participating with clubs herself, she encouraged students to get involved with clubs, including those sponsored by other teachers. Sharing a portable with the school's Family Resource Center staff, she also had opportunity to support the center's efforts. Again, taking up the mentoring role, she recounted sharing her experiences with a new director as his canned food drive struggled. Regarding administration, she noted that teachers looked to her to speak up in meetings about concerns or suggestions. Also, as already cited, she advised a former principal on how to be more involved and a part of the school's community.

PART TWO: "COMMUNITY" IN THE CLASSROOM

Mrs. García's classroom was located outside of the main building in one half of a portable unit. When I asked Mrs. García how she would describe her classroom, she responded, "homey" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016). She then continued:

> Everyone that comes by says it's very much like me. I talk a lot, I'm involved a lot. I had a teacher say it's too much. I couldn't learn anything in here because [the décor is too busy]. … From the plants, the kids feel like they're at home. They want to come over here and hang out for lunch all the time. And sometimes I let them but then I end up giving up my conference time to do that.

I also noted the "hominess" of her classroom. As I walked up the steps to the portable entrance, I was greeted by flourishing, green plants. Upon entering, I saw colorful posters and decoration up on every wall. A small plant made its home on her desk, which was situated in a corner opposite from the door. She watered it during out interviews. Also adding to the feel, she had an oversized sofa-like chair, not quite as big as a love seat, along the back wall of her classroom.

In this second part, I present a description of community as evidenced in Mrs. García's teaching practices within her classroom. As with Ms. Corazón, I want to briefly describe a few beliefs that contextualized this. Overall, Mrs. García felt that education should be relevant and applicable to life. She believed classes should connect to current affairs, such as the 2016 presidential election and the Black Lives Matter movement. She lamented a missed opportunity:

> We seem … to constantly be teaching all these things that I think are not as applicable to the children's lives. … What's the point of U.S. history when it's election time right now and you're too busy covering your materials for STAAR? What's going on in the beautiful world? What do you guys stand for? (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 19, 2016)

She continued in the following meeting saying, "I'm not really sure that what we teach the kids is really relevant to their lives. Or to us understanding their lives. We have these tests that we have to shove down their throats" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016). Calling for a life-relevant educational focus, she noted the importance for both students *and* teachers to focus on and learn from students' lives. As an example, she stated that students should learn about institutionalized racism and understand why

and how "they're being displaced from their communities" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

She also believed that community was important and influenced her teaching, stating:

> It almost drives me. I find myself talking to my students a lot about my story, my own story, where I come from. … I feel like I'm a constant role model for them—of the things that they can do. The possibilities that they can do. You know? And then with my native speaker Hispanic kiddos, it's the same thing. You have these barriers going up against you. If you don't have legal papers to be here, that's number one. But there's the dreamers act. And I kind of feel like if you left it up to me, I would not be teaching the preterite right now, I would be teaching how to fill out the applications for scholarships and the dreamers act. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

As I visited her classroom, all of these beliefs were evident in her teaching and interaction with students as she drew on various student communities.

A Community-Supporting Environment

Mrs. García constructed a playful environment in which there were high expectations for social and academic achievements. This supported a classroom space that truly did have a sense of "hominess" and a sort of family-type community in the classroom. She built this environment, in part, by integrating her students' communities into the classroom.

Having Fun. It quickly became evident that Mrs. García's playful personality was strongly represented in the classroom. In addition to using expressive tones and gestures, she often joked with her students. She peppered her instruction with little comments, at one point looking at the time and, finding class was nearly over, exclaimed,

"American minutes. Speedy Gonzalez!" (observation, April 14, 2016). Another time a student asked her what a Spanish phrase meant and she intentionally gave an incorrect translation. Other students quickly yelled out, "she's lying!" (observation, April 21, 2016), and she and the students all laughed as she gave the correct translation. During one of our meetings together, Mrs. García described how having students for a second year further opened possibilities for humor in the classroom:

> It's been two years of being together. … So we feel very comfortable, we can joke around. Like today one of them who's really a pain in the behind—because he's not doing much, he's not being successful, very spoiled young man—he refused to give up his cell phone. And he couldn't test. You know? And I just looked at him. And then he looked at my chanclas. And he goes, 'there's your chancla to beat me with Miss [García].' I probably would have given it to him, but the principal was sitting right there. And I said, 'uh, I do hit him with my chancla.' … So we have that sense of [humor]. I probably would get in deep trouble if somebody decides to take me seriously one day. … And I have my little stick over here and I call it my discipline plan. And one day it was broken, [students] go, 'Miss, it's broken.' And I go, 'yeah, I'm sorry, I lost my temper with a student.' And they looked at me like [Mrs. García makes a wide-eyed expression of disbelief]. But they know I'm joking. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

As suggested by this, she also described a reciprocity regarding playful interactions in the classroom. She shared that students tease her back, sometimes making fun of her accent.

I also observed that Mrs. García used playfulness to support classroom expectations (i.e. "classroom management"). She often used an exaggerated exclamation of "shhh" or "silencio!" (observation, April 18, 2016) to remind students that they should not be talking—or not be talking loudly—at various times. Another time, after having had reminded students not to eat in her classroom, she teased a student, "If you're eating in my class, you need to stop, or I'm going to take it away and share it with everyone"

(observation, April 20, 2016). She also pretended she was going to box a student's ears when he ignored her. The student responded in kind with exaggerated, pretended counter-actions before responding to Mrs. García's initial request.

High Expectations. A playful environment within the classroom did not undermine expectations and high standards for interpersonal expressions and academic success. Mrs. García demanded that students respect everyone and take ownership in the class as they worked in unison toward academic successes—demonstrated through grades and language mastery.

Social Interactions. Mrs. García shared her commitment to maintaining a respectful classroom. She said, "In the classroom they may not mess with each other. That's what I really go off on. I'm like, 'no, no, no, no. You do not do that in my room'" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016). As a part of this respect, she made it clear that she didn't allow cursing. Sharing conversations she had had with her students about this, she said:

> They kept teasing me there for a while they would say, 'say one bad word. One cuss word.' And I would say, 'why? Why do you want me to say that?' It would be highly inappropriate. I have a lot of fun with my students and I'm very open about a lot of things with them. But I have always told them that I don't allow cuss words in my class ever. So how can I curse? I don't think that teachers should expect any less of the students that you yourself are not willing to do or be. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

In addition to adhering to her own standards of not cussing, I also quickly noted her respect for students. She consistently thanked students as they entered at the beginning of the period as well as showed appreciation for them throughout class. Before answering a

telephone call, she asked her students to excuse her for a moment. Moreover, she addressed her students respectfully and affectionately with such terms as “mijo,” “señor,” or “señorita.” These commitments and expressions to her students, all set a precedence of respect within the classroom.

Beyond an environment of respect, Mrs. García also expected students to participate with and take ownership in their class. She created space for this by regularly acknowledged her shortcomings and asking students to help or offer grace. During one class she said, “I feel like I really messed up with this yesterday” (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016), as she informed students why they were redoing a lesson. Students seemed to find place within the classroom through this. I witnessed students regularly interrupted to ask questions or even to correct something Mrs. García had said or done (e.g. spelling or correcting the date on white board). She also shared responsibilities with her students, including having them pass out papers and grade each other’s work. A telling event was when she received a phone call informing her a nearby grocery store would support a school beautification event. Her excitement was immediately shared as she began clapping and jumped into the air kicking her legs up exclaiming, “I got $100!” (observation, April 14, 2016). Wanting her students to take part, she called another teacher on speakerphone and had the students shout, “We got $100!” (observation, April 14, 2016). In addition to simply expecting students’ participation in the classroom, she worked to create space for this to happen. All of this supported a community-type environment.

Academic Efforts. Not only did Mrs. García expect students to work diligently to learn Spanish—during class time and beyond—she expected them to strive beyond a standard effort. She was upfront about the difficulty of the work, encouraging students to "push," saying things like, "don't give up" (observation, April 20, 2016). She also made statements like, "Everybody, we are doing this together … Everybody can do this, everybody. Don't tell me, 'I can't do this'" (observation, May 2, 2016) as the class completed an assignment together. She described these expectations saying:

> And they are about to go to high school and I'm constantly telling them, … 'you know this is a high school credit class. You walk in my door you're not in middle school anymore. … You need to have a binder.' I say, … 'you need to be realistic. If you're the type that doesn't like to carry a pencil or paper, much less a binder in a backpack, please, there's the door. Go and change your schedule. You're not going to hurt my feelings because you will fail my class if you do not have these things. Here's a letter to inform your mom, you must have the Spanish binder. You must study your vocabulary. And your mom has to sign it.' (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Beyond setting this standard, she also involved students in pushing themselves for the grade they wanted. Midway through a six-weeks period, she took class time to ask students to write their ideal grade and then figure out how to achieve it. She pressed them, "So if you have an 85, why not push yourself to get an A?" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016).

Communication with parents corroborated expectations and involved students' familial communities. In letters sent home at the beginning of the year, Mrs. García stated that she believed all students who put forth effort in the class could do well and pass the course, but that she expected they keep up with materials and complete regularly assigned

homework. She reminded parents that the course was high-school level and that the student's grade would follow him or her. Throughout the year she wrote notes to parents through the school's newsletter to communicate about homework. She also made phone calls to parents on a regular basis both during class (offering opportunity for parents to talk with their child) and after.

Mrs. García engaged students in ways that also demonstrated her support for students' high level of academic achievement beyond her class. As mentioned, she regularly checked students' grades for all their classes. This concern—tied to the larger, school community—was also evidenced through consistent connections during instruction. After having students grade each other's work, she said, "tu necessitas praticar tu matimaticas, jovenes [you need to practice your math]" (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016). She also taught about math through finances, integrated art and music, spoke about writing, and related material to language arts classes. Furthermore, though her class was not a tested subject, she prompted students to prepare for the upcoming standardized test by pushing in all classes and taking care of zeros.

Accountability For All. Mrs. García held both students and herself accountable to these expectations. She shared her conviction that the onus for students' success was on the teacher. While she said she didn't believe in the amount of standardized testing students had to complete, she did feel the tests mattered and that teaching was reflected. She worked to support students' success in numerous ways, but two elements she highlighted were her workload and grade recording. She stated that she heard from teachers that they didn't expect homework to be done so they didn't give any.

Disagreeing and believing homework to be imperative for learning, she gave homework weekly. She also stated that she took more grades than other teachers so that students would have a chance to make the grades they wanted and not get stuck with one bad grade. In all, rather than "blaming" students for their level of success, she held responsibility.

As described, Mrs. García used both humor and candid conversations to support standards for behavior, switching artfully between the two. She connected this kind of accountability for social behavior to learning saying that when the students are in charge and teachers are not setting and holding to these expectations, the students aren't learning. She also felt that the boundaries she set served to create a "safe" environment for her students. She remarked that she got letters at the end of the year thanking her for maintaining high standards which led to a safe classroom in which students knew they wouldn't get cussed out or attacked.

Community-Connected Curriculum

In addition to facilitating a family- or community-type classroom space, Mrs. García also made connections to her students' communities through formal and informal curriculum.

Official Curriculum. Mrs. García regularly used standard texts in her teaching; however, she gave concentrated and selective emphasis to some parts of the texts over others. She shared an example:

> I have a great textbook that has some incredible stuff on sociology and anthropology. … I spend way too much time on it. But it really brings out a lot of discussion about who are we?—as a people. And why are we the

> way that we are? And it teaches them about values and customs and traditions and how even Latinos can be so different from the people of Cuba and then we have people from Guatemala and Honduras and so it's great on saying, what unites us is our language. I do it a little bit different every year, but culture with the big "C" and little "c." (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

Bringing up these conversations about culture and identity multiple times throughout meetings, she gave an example of potty training and how different cultures and groups of people approach the practice differently, asking her students to consider their own experiences and beliefs.

Mrs. García made other links between the curriculum and her students' communities as well. When covering a textbook passage on chamber music and "la opera," she brought in another teacher to play the violin and connected the lesson to art more broadly, sharing about Mexican artists and then Austin's Pecan Street Festival. At another point she "corrected" a term used in the text, saying that it was different in Texas. In addition to connecting to this geographic community, she also gave concentrated attention to Central and South America, asking students to locate countries on a map and asking them about the countries, such as who the president was. Finally, Mrs. García brought the class community into the curriculum. When writing up worksheets, she sometimes integrated her and her students' names into them in playful ways.

Mrs. García used assignments as another way to connect instruction to students' communities, particularly their families. She told students to study their vocabulary by opening up their refrigerator or going to the store with their mom. She used activities in which she required parental participation. She recounted a sincere conversation she had

with her students about how culture and negative cycles are easily repeated and an activity related to this saying:

> And there's this survey that I send home and the parents get very uncomfortable with it. But it's about how [the students] were raised. And what do [the parents] feel about corporal punishment? And you actually have conversations with your kids. … It's not just a yes and no. So I asked the kids questions like, 'do you think it's good to spank?' … Oh and cursing. 'You know my mom cursed like a sailor. She cursed up a storm. How many of your parents curse?' Hands go up like crazy. 'How many of you are allowed to curse?' Hands go down. … 'You know I will never say a bad word in the classroom, but how many of you think that I curse outside or at home?' And then a few hands go up. And a lot of them don't. And so I say, 'are you afraid for raising your hands? I want you to be honest.' … Because of that, we talk about how we repeat patterns of our parents. 'Someone that is an alcoholic, what do you think might happen?' And I show them, that there are studies that show that, 'you're an 80 percent chance that you're gonna be an alcoholic. 80.' … It's really intense. But it's really cool to be able to do that. To make them think about those kinds of things. … Our parents are not all good, they're not all great. We love them, they're great, but if we had those parents that are being verbally abusive and are constantly telling you that you're stupid and la la la, I mean you have to survive that somehow. You know? But by all means don't do that to your own kid. Like my mom was really hard on me on many levels. And yet the day she died, I thought it was the end of my world. And I tell my kids that. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 9, 2016)

As demonstrated by this, Mrs. García recognized the difficult circumstances and environments that some of her students faced at home. However, despite this recognition, she most often positioned parents in an esteemed place. In support of another textbook chapter on finances assignment, she asked students to complete a made up budget. Again involving parents, she asked them to first consult their parents. She recalled telling her students:

> 'And now this is where you parents are going to say well it's none of her business, but I want to know the budget of your family. Because it's going

> to be an eye-opener for you of how little they make, but how much they have to pay. So maybe you'll stop nagging them about that $500 phone.' (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

This statement demonstrates one way she showed respect for her students' parents.

Through the official curriculum, then, Mrs. García consistently brought her students' communities—including cultural, home, geographic, national communities—into the classroom.

Unofficial Curriculum. As already shown through previous examples, Mrs. García often taught through conversation. I found these conversations formed a sort of unofficial curriculum. Connected to her beliefs about teaching and education, these exchanges were intentional and focused on students' communities and critical issues around the students' marginal statuses.

Life Lessons. Mrs. García found opportunities to engage students in conversations that centered on their communities and often brought in her own experiences. She gave an example:

> We talk a lot about their parents. And I understand what they hear at home because I used to hear it from my mom all the time. So they feel like I totally understand them. I go, 'is this what you hear?' … [And my students say] 'Oh my God! It's like that's exactly what my mom says.' So I understand them and then I'm able to say, 'this is why [your parents] are doing this.' (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

Even as she worked to help students in their relationships with their parents, she also validated parents, such as telling her students that they needed to listen and that she hoped they had a "mean" mom (said in a joking way) who would push them to go to college. Conversely, she positioned students as role models for their siblings saying:

> ‘If nobody in your house graduates from high school, you’re all your brothers and sisters have. Because you’re going to be a role model to follow. … You have a responsibility to your family, to your community, … if you graduate and you go to college, you’re setting an example for them to follow.’ (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

She continued by counter balancing her statement saying that while going to college was important, not going to college did not mean failure and that her father used to say that anyone who “has an honest paying job” deserves respect.

Mrs. García also validated students’ language, culture, and nationalities within the classroom. One way she did this was through codeswitching, mixing Spanish, English, and slang used by her students. She also spoke with students about other countries beyond Mexico—countries they had roots in—and encouraged students to bring foods that represented their own culture to the class’ Cinco De Mayo party (e.g. Arabic breakfast foods). Finally, calling for respect toward language learners, she connected class content to the English language and challenged students to consider how difficult learning English is.

School communities also came up informally. Mrs. García gave privileged place to the Student Council and beautification events; she allowed students from HMS’s Student Council to make an announcement during her class, showed a picture presentation from a past beautification event, and announced an upcoming school dance. Beyond this, she also asked students if they were part of another teacher’s science club, adding how cool the teacher was. In addition to HMS communities, Mrs. García consistently spoke to students about high school. She not only reminded them that the

class was a high school level class, but also talked with students about opportunities and programs that would be available to them.

Social Critique. Within the classroom, critical issues were also brought up. Mrs. García stated that she did not shy away from these conversations:

> We are constantly talking about things—race, politics, religion. … I talk about being married to a White man—'like you all have something against White people?' [Students ask], 'why didn't you marry a Mexican?' And I'm like, 'they're a bunch of drunks. … oh see? Those are just generalizations.' … And they're like, 'ay Miss, I can't believe you're saying that.' And the other one says, 'stupid, she's trying to make a point.' … And I told them … yeah, [my first marriage] I married a Muslim in a Catholic church. And it's just about breaking down these barriers. (Mrs. García, personal communication, March 8, 2016)

As seen here, she sometimes made startling remarks to engage students in thinking about issues. She also spoke straightforwardly, not using ambiguous terminology or statements. In another instance, she told a student his name was beautiful and encouraged him to insist that others use the Spanish pronunciation with which he was named. Furthermore, recognizing inequality between West and East Austin schools, she worked to give her students advantages. She talked with them about traveling, for instance, in hope of inspiring them to dream beyond what they currently imagined possible and told them they were already ahead of her since they knew two languages and she only knew Spanish at their age. Subtly interwoven, I found critically based conversations around inequity to be a consistent current in her classroom.

SUMMARY

Mrs. García's descriptions revealed the concept of "community" as both simple (e.g. a group of people with commonality or geographically based) and complex (e.g. positive and negative, layered, and connected across time). She presented a school community as holding both positive (i.e. strengthening) and negative attributes (see Figure 6.1) and brought up understandings of power. Implicit throughout her descriptions and reflections was a presence of inequity and power as she alluded to such issues as hierarchies (e.g. teachers not listened to in meetings), exclusions (e.g. immigrant students left out of some school opportunities), and various forms of privilege (e.g. economic or title) exerted both within and between communities.

The examples Mrs. García gave of students' communities portrayed them as a group united by commonality—a definition in line with her general statements about community. Often mentioning, both implicitly and explicitly, HMS' attendance zone, her examples were primarily geographically-based and at a micro (i.e. local) scalar level. Residences, businesses, and institutions all fell within this boundary. Also, her attention to infrastructure, including school walkways and hallways, public roads and intersections, and mass transit (i.e. busses and metro rail) connected to geography. In addition to geography, she brought up identity through nationality and, more often, language. These examples demonstrate recognition of a macro (i.e. international) view and correspond to non-school related examples (e.g. musicians worldwide). There were some differences between her initial and later discussions, though. Supportive, community-strengthening

characteristics were not as prominent in descriptions of her students' communities. Also, negative characteristics differed between school and student communities.

Knowing not only the physical area around the school, but also the people, the businesses, the schools, the infrastructure, and the stories, Mrs. García held a long-time, experientially-based knowledge of her students' communities that validated her conviction that her students' communities were her own. She demonstrated depth of knowledge of the North Austin area—the only teacher to share things I had been unaware of within the area. In her photography, she also demonstrated knowledge of her students and their families, taking pictures of their specific residences and businesses they shopped at. Similarly, her detailed mapping of the students' communities in North Austin also revealed this. Her efforts to build relationships with her students, their parents, and school communities further reinforced her position as part of "the community," which included geographic, identity, family, school, and day-to-day communities.

Within the classroom, Mrs. García engaged students in playful ways while simultaneously maintaining a very high expectation of them to not only excel in her high-school level classes, but in all their classes. Within this family-type environment, she took on the role of the "other mother" Dixson and Dingus (2008) even as she reinforced the importance and "rightness" of students' biological mothers. She also positioned their communities as useful for learning from, further validating them. She did this through formal curriculum as well as conversations woven through the curriculum—a kind of unofficial curriculum. In addition to spending formal and informal curricular time on life

lessons, she did not hesitate to speak candidly with students about sociocultural norms and biases.

In all, a key element of Mrs. García's classroom seemed to be her motherly commitment to her students' wellbeing. She consistently bent the rules and norms in order to support them, revealing an authentic concern for students' academic, physical, and social wellbeing both in the present and the future spaces.

Chapter 7: Mrs. Taylor

The data from my third case, Mrs. Taylor, is presented in this chapter. I have broken it into two main sections: 1. Mrs. Taylor's conceptions of community, including how she described her students' communities and herself in relation to them, and 2. how community existed within her classroom.

PART ONE: CONCEPTIONS OF "COMMUNITY"

Mrs. Taylor did not belabor general conceptions of community. Rather, her answers moved quickly to drawing on her students as a reference. Therefore, I briefly present some understandings Mrs. Taylor shared on community and then the school community. Following this, I move to her conceptions of her students' communities and herself in relation to these.

What is a Community?

"I tend to think of it like a neighborhood. … Like, the Norman Rockwell kind of neighborhood with families working together, living together. … It is all kind of like a family," (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016) said Mrs. Taylor in response to my question about her thoughts on what a community is. She continued:

> I think of a little town, a neighborhood where everybody's interacting, everybody's going to same school, everybody's involved in what's happening and in their town hall. That's the ideal, and that's what I think about. But it doesn't mesh with the experiences happening here [at HMS]. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

Her descriptions were clear. Invoking pre-civil rights era scenes from the twentieth century American artist, Rockwell, Mrs. Taylor brought up White, nostalgic notions that included geography (i.e. a town or neighborhood), people, and institutions (i.e. a school, or town hall). As already noted, though, she was quick to bring in comparison to her present reality, working at HMS, which will be turned to presently.

Also present in Mrs. Taylor's initial descriptions was a sense of congeniality among community members. This was a concept she brought attention to multiple times. She described communities being like families, empathizing and looking out for each other. Additionally, she stated that groups defined by race and socioeconomic status (i.e. communities) should engage with each other in humanizing ways:

> No matter what the color is or what the economics of that person is—I think if you can empathize with situations, if you're less scared to approach people in different economic situations, … and if you know a person is human … or that their worth as much as you're worth, then that's the way that you get interaction between groups. And once you get groups to interact, then you find more in common with each other and that just builds the bond. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

The act of empathizing, combined with valuing, then, was presented as key for a positive conception of community as well as for its strength. This complimented her first thoughts about an idealized town or neighborhood.

Seeking to contrast humanizing acts and harmonized towns, Mrs. Taylor drew attention to Austin to talk about present day segregation within the city. She stated:

> We have very, very rich families in Austin and very, very poor people in Austin with families. … There is no middle class really. … The middle class has moved out to Pflugerville or Round Rock, Cedar Park. … So what you end up having is a very incredibly poor section and then an

> incredibly wealthy section. And they don't mix. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Describing the economic foundation of this dynamic, she continued to consider the racial implications this held for schools and their student populations:

> So in the 60s that integrated everything—everything is fine. But that's not what happened. So if you look at my school, we don't have any White kids. It's like maybe 10 …. So I have a brown school here and then my kids are in a white school there. And they call it economic segregation. … Two totally different worlds living side-by-side within a mile of each other, and there's nothing in the middle. … We have this legal segregation that's happening even though segregation is illegal. … Under a different name. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

This accounting of neighborhoods as distinctly separate and fully divided was presented as an alternative picture from the first, suggesting the segregation existing during Rockwell's time was overlooked. Mrs. Taylor's racially undergirded view of an ideal community, then, was one in which people lived harmoniously collaborating toward the betterment of each other and the area. In contradiction to this, she simultaneously recognized current exclusionary manifestations of the concept—economic, and, thus, racial segregation—as negative characteristics of community.

Community within a school context. In considering community, Mrs. Taylor quickly brought the notion into a context of school. She described how smaller communities exist within a school (e.g. friend groups) and also larger ones beyond (e.g. a school district). In addition to these examples she also described other communities within the school including grade level teacher teams, the Parent Teacher Association, the Campus Advisory Council, and Cadres (groups of teachers focused on specific subjects or efforts).

Leadership. Beyond giving examples, she brought attention to the structure and functioning of these communities, specifically noting a hierarchical nature of communities. In line with this she spoke of how leadership strongly affects a community. She specifically mentioned how the then current principal stood in the hallways smiling and talking to the kids during passing periods and how she recognized a change across the school campus, linking it to his positive impact. She shared:

> I thought …he's not going to last long. And his enthusiasm carried on, and it's contagious. There are teachers who are smiling that I wouldn't even hang around with last year because they were so miserable, and they were talking about the kids negatively, talking about the school negatively. … It's amazing what a difference someone who's in the leadership role can make. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

In addition to his friendly mannerisms, Mrs. Taylor also said that the principal was working to bring in new programs fostering excitement on the campus about future possibilities. In a later meeting she returned to this concept, saying that those in charge set the "tone" and that if teachers "buy in" to that then they feel like part of the community (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016), suggesting that membership was influenced by all participants. Finally, in our last meeting, Mrs. Taylor described how the word "CRIP" was etched into a door window at the end of the hallway she taught in. She felt this spoke to administration perception of students since the marks were made before she began teaching at HMS. This tied in with her contention that leadership set a campus climate and tone, though through a negative application.

Teacher Communities. In contrast to the characteristic of hierarchy she found within the school community, Mrs. Taylor described the need for equal roles within

teacher communities. Offering her professional learning community (PLC) as an example of a poorly-functioning community, she cited inequity of roles as the reason. She described this saying:

> We have a PLC … so that's me and the two other teachers on my science team and it's very dysfunctional. But that's supposed to be a place where you plan the lessons together and you bring in ideas and its collaborative, but both those teachers are new so it's just me writing lessons. … So that community is supposed to be more socialist, you know everybody has an equal piece, but it's not. It's more me telling them what to do. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

So while she found hierarchy (through leadership) important within the larger HMS community, within this context she considered it detrimental. Offering an opposing example she described her science department saying:

> It's pretty much the only department on campus that's really tight knit. We have it together. We work well together. There's no fighting and between us or bickering. If there's a disagreement that we resolve it, you know we listen to each other's sides and everything. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

Contrary to her statement about her PLC, Mrs. Taylor felt that her department was a well-functioning community based on the equitable interactions among members. She praised the eight grade science teachers in particular, saying that they had been together for many years and that it was their support that got her through her first year at HMS as an eighth grade teacher.

In addition to describing the need for equitable relationships for sustaining a strong teacher community, Mrs. Taylor also mentioned how the spatial layout of HMS campus served to both form and isolate teacher communities. Explaining this process she said:

> I never go up the 100 hallway. It's very weird. So there are places I just never go unless we're forced to go. So in that regard it's very isolating, I mean this is my hallway. So everybody knows everybody in this hallway. Shout across the doors, you know to other teachers. You know if you need help, so that's our community. … But then there's like a couple other science teachers out so they probably don't have that bond they don't feel like they're part of this you know they feel isolated even though they are included in the meetings. … So there are lots of, it's really interesting … all these different pieces to this puzzle (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

The fact that she felt connected to teachers in her hallways and that she felt some teachers might have perceived themselves as isolated despite being included in meetings, suggests that spatial proximity is an important aspect of community for Mrs. Taylor. This and the other characteristics of school communities that she described aligned with her more general notions of community as people, geographically and institutionally tied, and working together.

Students' Communities

Through my conversations with Mrs. Taylor she mentioned a variety of communities she felt her students belonged to. In this section I will first present an overview of these examples and then turn to some characteristics that defined them within her accountings.

Specific communities. Throughout our conversations Mrs. Taylor identified several communities her students belonged to. At a macro level, she grouped identities in a singular way to form a community that she indicated nearly all HMS students belonged to. As part of this identity, she recognized language as a prominent, identifying Spanish-English bilingualism and stating that students were mostly "Hispanic." She also described

students as “poor” and noted some were undocumented immigrants. At a local, meso level, she stated that Austin was one of the students’ communities. She felt neighborhoods served as communities and that this included specific residences (e.g. an apartment complex) as distinct communities. At the level of the school she recognized friend groups (i.e. cliques) as communities her students belonged to as well. Finally, the smallest level was family. Though she found the notion of family somewhat distinct from community, she said that families were a sort of micro community. Of these examples she described students’ communities most often in terms of ethnicity (i.e. Hispanic), socioeconomic status (i.e. poor), and language (i.e. Spanish).

Specific communities in photography. Mrs. Taylor’s photographs showed a wide variety of features that she felt represented her students’ communities. These included parts of the school campus as well as churches, residences, businesses, and infrastructure that surrounded the school. Within HMS’s campus, a variety of areas outside of the school building were shown including what Mrs. Taylor reported were multiple socializing areas, including by the bus lane (Image 7.1); a garden; sports areas (i.e. basketball and soccer); areas around the portables; and a parking lot. At the edge of the campus, crossing the road that ran in front of the school, the rail track was captured (Image 7.2). Within the school building was a single picture of a ripped up bulletin board (Image 7.3) and a door with the word “CRIP” etched into it.

Beyond the campus, and by far the most represented aspect of the students’ communities, were the businesses. With about half of all the photos showing businesses, these included food venues (e.g. Mexican restaurants—see Image 7.4—and a panaderia);

fast food restaurants, including the Dairy Queen across the street from the school that the students frequented (Image 7.5); furniture shops; retail stores (e.g. Target and Petsmart); re-sale stores (i.e. Goodwill, Salvation Army, and a pawnshop); a Tesla car service center (Image 7.6); hair salons, a gas station, and other businesses found within strip malls nearby the school (Image 7.7). She noted the use of Spanish on some of these businesses' signs. As she talked about these businesses she remarked that the students probably shopped at the Goodwill and used the services of other shops—with the exception of the Tesla service station which she used to contrast two communities living next to each other, and also remarked that that Target and Petsmart served as fighting grounds for students. Other institutions represented in the photographs included a library less than a mile from the school and two nearby churches.

Also located within a few miles of HMS, infrastructure and residences were shown within the images. As mentioned, Mrs. Taylor took pictures of a parking lot, bus lane, and rail track on the campus, but extending beyond were pictures of main roads (Image 7.8), and a city bus station. Residences were the least represented with only a few pictures devoted to capturing apartment buildings (Image 7.9), trailers (Image 7.10), and a homeless person. She felt the infrastructure represented the students' communities because the students rode the busses and the metro rail ran through their geographic and school community. The few images of the residences were taken to represent students' home environment, showing the poverty of the area.

Characteristics of the communities. In addition to providing specific instances or aspects of her students' communities, Mrs. Taylor's accounts revealed some

characteristics she felt the communities held. These included common identity, sense of value, layers across levels, and negative elements.

Common identity. One characteristic consistent through Mrs. Taylor's remarks was how her students' communities shared identity or status related factors. She described how a common language, ethnicity, religion, or residence served to define groups.

Focusing on language, Mrs. Taylor felt this not only defined communities, but was also key to entrance into communities. She explained this process saying:

> I think it's also like a key to get into the community. If you don't speak Spanish you're excluded, or if you don't speak English you're excluded. So there can be rules for who belongs. ... If you go down further into the students community, without the teachers, if you primarily just speak Spanish, you're not going to interact as much with the English-speaking person. If you primarily just speak English, you're not going to interact ... with the Spanish-speaking person. If you're a parent and you only speak Spanish, it's very difficult for you to get involved in a school community unless you have a translator. So that can be a key to getting in. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

In addition to being important for inclusion, then, she described how not knowing Spanish or English was also grounds for exclusion. She also mentioned how this dynamic included other members of students' communities—teachers and parents. Conflating race and ethnicity with language, Mrs. Taylor also felt HMS was identified by Spanish. She said, "[students] identify racially, or you know Spanish speaking versus not Spanish speaking communities, but … because our campus is almost homogenous with the ethnicities that we teach, it's mainly Spanish" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016). Language served as a defining feature for multiple student communities,

then. These included student groups, student-teacher groups, parents (i.e. families), and the school.

Mrs. Taylor also brought up the identifying feature of religion. She stated, "I teach mostly Hispanic kids and they're Catholic by default" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, July 19, 2016). She was not sure what churches they attended, but assumed they attended catholic churches based on their racial, ethnic, or national heritage. In a king of counter-confirmation of this, she added that she had seen a catholic church nearby, but that she doubted her students attended this church because it had a private school attached and she the people she had seen there were mostly White. For this reason, religion, added on to language, ethnicity, and race, was considered as part of her students' identities and served to define their communities.

Residence also served as a form of identification. Mrs. Taylor identified students as "trailer kids" and "apartment kids." These labels served to designate separate communities that came together at HMS. Therefore, a characteristic of her students' communities was a commonality of an identity (e.g. "Hispanic") or status (e.g. living in an apartment).

Sense of value. Present, though not prominent, was a characteristic of valuing or being valued. That is, Mrs. Taylor described that students felt valued or supported by their communities and that they also displayed their value of some communities over others.

Mrs. Taylor remarked that students' cliques served as a "support system" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016). She explained this support saying:

> Humans are very tribal by nature. We're not that far removed from apes. So you feel like a part of that group enough that [other members will] take care of you if you're sick or … you lose your job … Same with a group of friends. 'So-and-so broke up with me. I hate him so much.' And they rally around. So it's protection and acceptance. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

This presented students' experience of being valued within their friend communities. This level of value was enough that in resulted in members being cared for, either through nurturing or rejection of or aggression toward others outside of the group.

Student communities were also valued to varying degrees by members. Mrs. Taylor observed this characteristic in relation to scalar levels saying, "it seems like the smaller the community, the more important it is to the people in that community. So [students'] small community of their peers is more important than the larger community of the classroom" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016). She also felt this manifested in action saying that students didn't take care of the school space (e.g. throwing food on the floor or breaking pencils). In contrast, she felt they valued their neighborhood and homes and, therefore, didn't litter or damage property. Mentioning students' families in similar terms she said:

> I think they value family. I think that's the most important thing. … Students will stay home because they have to take care of the younger sibling. … I think that's the most important thing because the kids, some kids, most kids are interested in helping their families. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

This showed that as a result of assigned hierarchical importance, action (e.g. staying home to take care of siblings) corresponded with a community's rank. Thus, in these two ways, a sense of value was present as a characteristic of students' communities.

Layers across levels. As already came up in the previous paragraph, student communities were shown as interactive—existing as layered across scalar levels. Mrs. Taylor gave multiple examples of this layering. At a more macro level she described how students were part of the city (a community), but then that the city was broken up into socioeconomic communities. As also already noted, she identified students as belonging to a large, school community, but then that they belonged to specific residential communities outside of the school. Finally, at a micro level, she stated that within the school community are classroom communities and that within the classroom are groups of friends. In addition to recognizing this layering across levels Mrs. Taylor remarked on the significance of recognizing layers. She shared:

> Levels matter; smaller levels of communities are stronger. So you can start very small with the family, but once you start gravitating or expanding to the school system, and then out into the larger area, it can be less intimate. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

This idea corresponded with her ideas about students' values—that they valued their homes more than the classrooms. In all, a third characteristic of students' communities was their existence at various scales that allowed for students to belong to multiple nested communities.

Negative elements. By far, the predominant characteristic within Mrs. Taylor's descriptions of students' communities was various negative aspects. These existed as imposed upon student communities; between student communities and other communities and between student communities; and within student communities.

Upon student communities. Mrs. Taylor shared some negative elements that were imposed upon her students' communities. These included danger, fear, and prejudice.

Considering the metro rail that was built across the students' school and neighborhood communities, she shared the danger this posed for students as they had to engage with it on their way to and from HMS. She stated:

> We just had to have a train track safety meeting with the kids—an assembly. Because some of them were lying down on the train tracks, taking pictures of themselves doing that. But a lot of the kids walk this way. And go home this way. Because there's a lot of apartments that way. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Despite the students' choice to play "chicken games" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, July 19, 2016) with the trains, Mrs. Taylor indicated that this dangerous track was placed at the edge of HMS's campus which forced some students to walk across it in order to walk to the school in the morning and home in the afternoon.

Another negative factor that some students dealt with within their community was fear of deportation. Mrs. Taylor remarked, "many of [my students] are scared that they will get deported or someone will find out that they are not here legally" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, July 19, 2016). She said this fear, kindled by false information given by some teachers at HMS, caused students to not apply for a library card at the library less than a mile from the school.

Related to a threat of deportation, Mrs. Taylor also shared that prejudice was expressed upon her students' communities. At the beginning of the school year prior to this study, Mrs. Taylor said that the (then) principal had the teachers do a community walk in which they visited students' homes to welcome them to the school and new year.

Recalling this event she shared her colleagues reaction when they entered a small trailer park:

> I was riding around with another teacher and he was driving me nuts. He was going, 'where can I park? I'm worried about my car getting stolen.' It's that attitude—it's frustrating. You teach these kids and you're worried about your car. Nobody's gonna steal the car. It's one of the stereotypes. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

In addition to stereotyping students, she also criticized the notion of meritocracy and the application of it upon students' families and parents. She shared this saying:

> Some people just don't get it. Like, 'well if they work hard enough they would pull themselves up.' It's not that easy when there are all these other factors involved. Maybe you can't make minimum wage. Maybe the only way you can make money is under the table. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

In critiquing the merit-based, "if you work hard enough" argument, she also brought attention to other negative restraints of income that was perhaps felt by her students' communities.

These dangers, fears, and prejudices were all based somewhat externally and exercised upon student communities, forming a negative aspect around the communities.

Between communities. Tensions among students and other groups were also noted. Mrs. Taylor stated that students' micro communities within HMS were at odds with each other at times. Examples of this were fighting and shouting. She said that at the beginning of the year two girls had fought over a boy and one had been injured severely. In another instance she stated that, "instead of the kids just walking down the hallway, ... they're shouting at each other" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016). She attributed this to behavioral issues resulting from students raising themselves.

Finding conflict between students' school and home communities, she shared that teachers call home with negative reports about students and that this causes a forced relationship in which parents don't want to interact with teachers but have to.

Mrs. Taylor also identified some negative relationships between student communities and other more privileged communities. On multiple occasions, she pointed out a wealthier community, which included property and businesses (e.g. a Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, BMW service center), that encroached upon and surrounded one half of the HMS campus. Describing these affluent and student groups as circles she reasoned:

> It's really weird, ... it's a circle inside of the bigger circle. ... maybe the little circle is the school, and it's surrounded. Around the school are the rich people. And they're not really touching that inner circle. So I wouldn't really call this situation a community so much. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

In this comment is a consideration of how communities may be connected and yet nearly completely isolated from each other. She explained this in more tangible terms saying:

> These are the homes the kids do not live in. They're $300,000. ... These are in their community but they're not a part of their community. ... [Students] see these houses all the time. They walk to school and these houses are right across the street. ... They don't interact with the people there unless it's, 'get off my lawn.' And we'll get complaints at the school that kids are on people's property. And there will be an announcement over the intercom, 'please be respectful,' and so on. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, July 19, 2016)

Despite separation between the communities, she did found interaction, but this proved minimal and negative. Applying this dynamic to characteristics of community she said, "community doesn't have to be a happy thing. It can be a conflict. It can be a clash. ... the smashing of worlds" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, July 19, 2016).

In addition to demanding separation despite proximity, Mrs. Taylor believed that higher-income communities fostered a negative relationship with her students' communities through a lack of concern for the less privileged students. Stating that these communities were thinking short-term by not investing in the students' futures she said:

> Right now our system is against them. ... We don't have people ... in the middle-class and upper-class who are thinking about these kids and what can happen to the kids when they become adults. ... And investing in the schools that are failing, and figuring out what to do about that. Investing in the kids in their home life and funneling money somehow to alleviate the strain that these parents feel bringing them up. We're so shortsighted. ... And maybe [middle- and upper-class communities should think] it's in my best interest to invest into my community to make my community better. Because then maybe the new adults will be able to feed their families so they're not breaking laws so they can feed their families and provide Christmas presents for their families. ...That's where crime stems from. ... So we're going to have more crime? ... Or are we going to help lift up the kids so they'll be able to provide for their families and then go back into their communities after they graduate from college and help them come out of poverty? (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

Considering a lack of investment in student communities an short-sighted oversight, she felt it was a missed opportunity for higher-income communities because of her belief that student communities were committing more crimes than other communities as a result of the "system" being against them (i.e. limited resources), and that money would alleviate this. She also felt this was cyclical in nature and that, if assisted, students would later return to their communities to disrupt continued poverty.

Within student communities. Mrs. Taylor shared the most, by far, regarding negative aspects within student communities. She spoke to superficial inclusion, perceived lack of worth, harmful home environment, and hopelessness.

As Mrs. Taylor shared about students' membership within a larger Austin community, she noted superficial inclusion within this space. She began by contemplating how students did not feel a sense of belonging, saying, "[students] do belong to the bigger community outside of the school, but I don't think they realize that. ... I don't think they feel like they belong to that part of the community" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016). As she continued considering this dynamic of belonging but not feeling like it, she suggested that it was because students didn't interact with areas of Austin outside of their neighborhood and school areas as a result of their low-income status and stated, "their world is right here. They walk to school, they hangout up at PetSmart, they take care their family" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016). Illustrating this point, she gave an example of taking students on a field trip to a major university within the city and having a student ask if they were still in Austin. Adding a layer to students' sense of being outsiders within the larger community, she described how Austin embraced her students' culture, but did so superficially. She stated:

> Austin—they feel like those kids are part of their community, and they embrace them, embrace Spanish heritage pretty much. You know, there's Mexican restaurants. You see a lot of the roads are Spanish names. So in their way they embrace that, but it's a one-way embrace. Because what's happening is, yeah we accept Spanish-language and we accept this culture that's here and it's pretty cool, but they aren't funneling that money down to help bring these kids up. Because there's this anchor of poverty in this area. ... So because nobody's helping them out, these kids don't feel like they're a part of anything bigger. So the bigger community feels like they embrace this [student] community, but it's very superficial. It's like yay Mexican stuff is cool ... yeah we embrace everybody. But do you really? How far does that go? Does that just mean going to eating Mexican food? ... Celebrating Cinco de Mayo, which isn't even a Mexican holiday. ... Is

> that where it stops? Because that's not really embracing the people in the community, it might be acknowledging culture, but not going any deeper than that. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

While Mrs. Taylor did not seem to recognize Austin's longstanding Mexican history and heritage (i.e. suggesting that White Austin residences assigned Spanish names to roads as an embracing of Mexican Americans), she did realize the superficial nature of "embracing" her students' culture by eating "Mexican" food and participating in festivals (i.e. Cinco de Mayo).

Another negative characteristic within students' school community was the students' purported lack of valuing of it. Connected to the positive characteristic of value already presented earlier in the chapter, Mrs. Taylor expounded on the students destructive actions of breaking pencils or ripping up bulletin boards by saying that it represented their feelings about their school community, suggesting a kind of resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). She explained:

> I don't think they realize the value that school holds yet. Some do some get it, but a big chunk of the kids that I teach really don't understand the value of school. They feel like it's a placeholder. Like a place they need to be for certain amount time and then they can leave and do whatever they want. They don't think of it as a tool that can help to better the path of their lives. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

While she did state that students greatly valued their families (discussed further in "sense of value" section), its negative counterpart—not valuing school—paralleled with what has been described as "not caring" (Valenzuela, 1999).

In addition to students not feeling a sense of belonging to one community and not valuing another, Mrs. Taylor also described students' home communities as harmful or

hindering saying they faced things such as rape, fighting, and drugs. She shared other struggles saying:

> [Students are] dealing with, my mom can't pay for electricity; I'm homeless this week because we had to escape a domestic violence situation; the only time I get to eat is at school and that's why I'm here for school. … And maybe their parents—because we don't pay people a living wage—their parents are working two jobs. Or maybe the job is not a normal time so [students are] taking care of their younger brothers and siblings. They don't have time for homework. … It's very easy for a teacher to lose sight of the bigger picture. And I know some teachers get really mad like they'd ever bring a pencil. They didn't do their homework. They aren't listening in class. Well you have to understand, that you are not important to them. And you have them for maybe 15 minutes and you have to grab their attention and make it interesting enough for them to focus, because in their lives the most important thing is eating and sleeping and being warm and escaping violence. So all this life-threatening—well they're in panic mode all the time. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

While blame for these crisis situations seemed placed on the parents (e.g. domestic violence), she returned the conversation to income disparity, adding some structural reasons for why she felt students faced difficult situations at home, overlapping deficit and structural explanations (Brown, 2016). Beyond these threats to safety and well-being, Mrs. Taylor also described living conditions as unfavorable. She described this:

> The students that we serve are in the apartments that are in the community. Those apartments—and I've been to them—they're run down and mainly Hispanic and African-American apartments. There's a little trailer park that is amazing, that you have to go see. And they are not just trailers, their shacks. It's like these trailers are barely standing up. It's almost like you went across the border to Mexico. ... These trailers are in such shambles it's amazing. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Conflating race with living conditions, she presented students' residences as in a state of extreme disrepair. The few photos she took of apartments complexes and trailers showed

a heap of furniture by the dumpster and other dilapidated features (see Images 7.9 and 7.10).

Rather than considering students through a "wealth" (Yosso, 2005) lens, Mrs. Taylor focused on a perceived a sense of hopelessness among students--partially as a result of the home environment described. She shared a related theory a former principal had held that corresponded with her own beliefs saying:

> [Students are] starting to process—you know, the kids are being abused and all these issues drugs, weapons, whatever in the house—they're starting to understand that wow, this is affecting me. And they're also starting to understand ... that because I'm poor, my options for life are limited. So I can't have the same dreams that these other kids have. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

This statement suggested that students were previously unaware of inequities and that were only coming into this consciousness in middle school. Also contributing to a hopelessness, she stated that parents held low expectations for students' continued education, and that they themselves had limited education. She said:

> [Students'] parents didn't graduate, well I'm generalizing but mainly it's true, their parents didn't graduate from high school. Or they did but didn't go any further than that. And now they're landscapers, maids, very menial jobs. And [students] families' ... goals for them is to either get a high school education or drop out and help the family pay the bills. ... And I think [students are] starting to process that. And I try all the time to tell them that if you do well in school, that doesn't have to be your path. ... if you choose to do well in school, there are ways to go to college. ... And in the long run that money that you earn from that ... Associate's degree or a Bachelor's degree, or even higher, is so much more than a minimal wage job. I try to show them that. ... But they start to feel hopeless about their future ... they don't realize that the one thing they have power over is their education. And just turning your work and getting a good grade, that's your power right there. That's your ticket. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

Although Mrs. Taylor had critiqued a meritocratic argument aimed at students in another instance, here she asserted that despite barriers, students had only choose to do well in school and that this would mitigate any inequities and hindrances faced. In addition to holding merit-based notions, these statements also suggested that students were to blame for any lack of success as they chose to fail.

In all, these characteristics of common identity, sense of value, layers across levels, and negative elements, represented Mrs. Taylor's accountings of her students' communities.

Mrs. Taylor's Sense of Self in Relation to Students' Communities

Mrs. Taylor reported mixed feelings of belonging to her students' communities. In our final meeting she stated simply, "I'm part of their community no matter what, because of something they have to deal with every day" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016). She added:

> [Students] think of me as family somewhat. Some of them might call me mom accidentally .... I think there are some that kind of feel like I'm family but not to the extent of real family. It's more like she's a safe place, she's a person I can go to. ... There's a trust. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

She felt that, as a teacher, she was automatically "part of their community," but in referring to students' school community, she privileged it over other communities she had mentioned. Though she felt she was part of her students' communities within the context of school, she did not feel part of their home community or connected with their parents.

Aligning with students. Though school community membership was presented as expected, there were some ways in which Mrs. Taylor worked to align herself with her students.

With only months left before the contentious 2016 presidential election, Mrs. Taylor made her political stances clear. Explaining that she wanted to establish trust so that students would feel comfortable approaching her with problems and engaging in learning in the classroom she said:

> I … think that most of them know that I care about them. … There's trust, that not all white people are evil …. Because I get a lot of that, and like the most recent thing I've had to battle is the elections that are coming up. Oh my gosh, the vitriol that is being spouted against immigration and immigrants. A good portion of my kids are probably undocumented. So, 'oh miss do you like trump?' And I'm like, 'no! he's racist.' I'll be straight out. I don't care if we're supposed to stay apolitical or not. I will tell them right flat out that Trump is racist. And so once they realize that that's my position it makes them realize, oh not all white people … are what he's standing for. And I really … need to get them on my side to teach them. If they think I'm evil or discriminatory or whatever, they're not gonna learn from me. So … gaining their trust and showing them however I can that I'm on their side. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

In staking her position as anti-racist, then, she was able to align herself with her students. She also made her acceptance of undocumented students known, as well, through such instances of dispelling myths about getting a library card.

In addition to demonstrating acceptance of students' statuses, Mrs. Taylor also participated with students in extracurricular ways in order to foster their enjoyment in learning. She shared that she took some students to an all-day coding camp once a month, held at a public library and sat with them. She also began a science club and took students to a competition, buying lunch for them with her personal money while they were out.

She described the students excitement over these engagements which built her connection with them.

Misaligned with parents. As Mrs. Taylor explained why she felt little connection with her students' parents, she described barriers of language and parental actions or inactions.

As mentioned previously, Mrs. Taylor felt that language was key for having access to and membership with a community. In describing her students' parents as all not speaking English and herself as knowing only a handful of phrases in Spanish, then, this proved a significant limiting factor. She said that she did use Google Translate to have some conversations when absolutely necessary, but that she seldom attempted to call home.

Adding to reasoning for not calling students' parents, Mrs. Taylor said that in addition to her struggle with not speaking the same language, she was also worried about what actions the parent might take if she called, such as punishing a student too harshly for misbehavior. She shared, "you don't know what can happen at home. And I've seen too much abuse type of situations. And I've heard a lot about abuses" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016). In addition to worrying about abuse, she also stated that calls could be ineffective:

> I'm more reluctant to call because it's a struggle to talk to parents. ... And then there's some kids that you just don't call home because you figured out that parents aren't going to understand. So they will scream at you like, I don't know why you can't take care of the situation. ... So I can see why this child is misbehaving. Because that's what we get home. Being screamed all the time at home. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 28, 2016)

In contrast feeling parent's actions went to too much of an extreme, this statement suggested that she felt other parents failed to act in any helpful way. This placed blame on the parents for her lack of participation with students' home community. Also suggesting blame laid with parental inaction, Mrs. Taylor described parents being very uninvolved with their students' education. Though she had never been to a PTA meeting she believed there were only a handful of parents involved. She also said very few parents showed up to the science fair she helped put together and in which about 300 students participated. She also criticized the shift away from parent-teacher conference days, unlike her elementary school experience. All of these factors led to a sense of detachment between her and her students' communities outside of the school.

Finally, I noted that her personal investment might play a role in her disconnect with her students communities. Her residence (see Figure 4.3) placed her closer to the school than Mrs. Corazón and Mrs. García, however, she lived across a major highway in a more affluent, White neighborhood. She explained that they strategically moved there so that her (then) middle school boys could attend a middle school that was at a higher academic level than HMS. Moreover, during our final meeting together she noted a panaderia in one of her pictures and said she really loved the breads. I asked if she bought from the small bakery and she said she did not. This distance between her life and her students might also be considered a barrier for her participating with and belonging to her students' communities outside of the classroom context.

PART TWO: "COMMUNITY" IN THE CLASSROOM

Mrs. Taylor's classroom was situated about halfway down an inner hallway on the first floor of the main school building. Due to location there were no windows, but had two doors on the side connected to the hallway. Though sixth grade was largely placed out in the portables, this part of the building was designated for science classes. When I asked her about her classroom, she described it as a family, saying, "you know community is not a wrong word for the classroom, but I kind of think of the school more as a community and then our classrooms are little groups of families. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016).

In this second part of the chapter I present how Mrs. Taylor reported and I observed the concept of "community" to exist within the context of the classroom and her teaching practices. As with the other teacher participants, I begin with two founding beliefs about teaching that she held. These were, students should love learning and community is important for learning.

One topic that came up frequently in our conversations was testing. Mrs. Taylor strongly criticized standardized testing, saying that they did not support a love for learning. She believed that they did not really test what they were supposed to test, but instead were more reading comprehension focused, trying to trick students into getting wrong answers. As such, she felt that her students were at a language disadvantage and caused them to fail. She shared:

> These kids … speak Spanish mainly. And then we have an African-American population. They're low income, so they … don't hear that high

> level of language at home and stuff. So they're still kind of like English language learners. … And once you … realize, oh my students know science, they just can't read English, so …. Is the STAAR test really testing knowledge, or is it testing word problems in tricky English? … And so when my kids fail science tests over and over again or math tests over and over again, I know … that it's not because they don't know math or … science. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Whether her students were immigrants, citizens, native English speakers, or English learners, Mrs. Taylor felt they were all exposed to limited English (i.e. not "high level") and, thus, they did poorly on the tests. She continued explaining that these failings caused teachers to teacher in "dry and basic" ways. Feeling that this approach to teaching "kill[ed] the love of learning out of them" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016), she believed students should be engaged in fun activities. She explained that this was important for keeping her students from dropping out saying, "by the time I get them they are ready to drop out of high school. So I figure my job is to get them interested enough in science so they decide to stay in school" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016). In the face of testing and perceived limitations, she felt her role was to focus on simply getting students interested in learning.

Mrs. Taylor also believed community was important in the classroom for students' learning. She stated:

> I think in order to have the kids have buy-in into their learning experience, they have to feel like they're part of something and part of that is establishing some sort of community. … I think part of the community is that you're moving toward a common goal and that's basically what a classroom is. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

In addition to finding that students needed to feel a sense of community in the classroom in order to "buy in" to learning, she also believed teachers could not teach well "unless

[they] view the kids as [their] family" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016). Corresponding with this, she contended that, "if you love the kids you care about the kids. And then you care about what they're learning. … And you just figure out the best way to get it into them" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016). This portrayed classroom communities as hierarchically structured, with herself as the holder of knowledge to be deposited into students. She also felt that the classroom could serve as an "investment in the future" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016), impacting communities beyond her classroom. Connected to the aim of keeping learning interesting, she shared, "my goal is not necessarily teach science, which I teach science, but my goal is … inspiring them to dream, and to know that they can be more than maybe what other people tell them they can be" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016).

A Community-Enabling Environment

In describing her classroom and teaching, Mrs. Taylor noted aspects that enabled an environment of community. These were broadly represented by themes of family and a laxness.

A classroom family. Mrs. Taylor described a classroom structure that positioned herself as a mother figure and her students as her kids. As a result of this family structure, she communicated a sense of responsibility to maintain an environment of trust and respect saying:

> I feel like ... there's trust involved in the classroom. They have to be able to trust each other, and when someone breaks that trust they have to trust me to intervene. ... I had this one kid say today, 'you're like our mom, you

> take care of us.' ... So then there was a kid that says, 'no she's not our mom.' ... So the kids' perceptions are very different. ... But basically it's just a common goal, trying to get through the day doing your work, respecting each other. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

Continuing to explain the role she took up in her classroom, she said that it was important for students to see her as a trustworthy, respectful leader who values them. To facilitate this, she described her commitment to not get mad at students:

> I always tell them that they can never make me mad. And they really don't. … Some teachers yell and scream, I don't ever. ... if they come in and they're very angry and something happens, ... or they don't do their work, I'll call them on it. ... Just talking with them one-on-one ... taking an interest in them. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

Though she said that some of her students would shout out and try to pick fights with her or other students, she said she would encourage students to "be nice" and that she did feel the environment was "friendly" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016).

As I visited Mrs. Taylor's classroom, I noted that she did indeed remain calm replying with a regulated, somewhat detached, tone. For instance, when one student was consistently disrupting, she told him she was going to call home. He retorted, saying that his mom wouldn't answer and she simply stated, "I know sweetie, but I'll try anyway" (observation, April 20, 2016). During an honors class, one student, Clarissa (pseudonym), was being particularly disruptive by loudly playing music on her phone. Mrs. Taylor asked, "Clarissa will you please turn off that music?" (observation, April 21, 2016). Clarissa shouted back that it wasn't her music it was her alarm and that it could not be turned off as she continued bobbing her head and looking intently at the teacher. Rather than getting upset, Mrs. Taylor disengaged and continued passing out materials. Not

receiving further attention, Clarissa turned off the music, but remained on her phone. A minute later Mrs. Taylor returned and said, “Clarissa will you please get off the phone?” As Clarissa refused and Mrs. Taylor continued to ask her to put the device away and turn around to face forward in her chair, eventually Clarissa shouted out that Mrs. Taylor was in her space and that she could “do it,” but didn’t like Mrs. Taylor standing next to her. Acquiescing, Mrs. Taylor again responded with a calm, even tone, “Ok, if I walk away will you turn around? Let’s see.” and walked away. Still persisting with her phone use, Mrs. Taylor asked that she stop video recording and after a few more exchanges called the assistant principal.

While a dramatic example, these types of exchanges were not uncommon in the classroom. Throughout this and other conflicts, Mrs. Taylor always remained very calm, never screaming or showing anger toward her students. However, though she took up this demeanor with her students in this instance and some others, it did not resolve the disruption or conflict. In addition to this, her students often did not reciprocate her approach, yelling at each other and her, and even whistling at her. Students also frequently cursed at each other, purposefully got in each other’s way (e.g. blocking the doors to not let a student in or out), crumpled each other’s work, threw things across the room at each other (e.g. paper or a peanut), and in one instance a student sprayed cologne on another. These exchanges between students and toward Mrs. Taylor, then, did not portray a strong relationship between her and her students or a family environment as students showed little respect toward each other and her.

A lax approach. In line with her belief that learning should be fun, Mrs. Taylor described her classroom as flexible and playful. She commented on her own playfulness with students saying:

> They totally think I'm crazy because … I'll breakout with slang or something, 'stop texting your bae.' And they'll say, 'miss!' Or there's that dab move [gestured] …. The other day they said, 'you know Ms. Thompson [pseudonym]? Ms. Thompson is mean.' I said, 'oh no, … when we walk in the hallway we do the stanky leg and dab all the time.' 'What?! No you don't.' 'Yeah we do.' (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Demonstrating some knowledge of pop culture, this showed an attempt to engage in her students' lives in a way they could relate with. She also took care to not demean a colleague who was part of the larger school community, something I also witnessed during a visit.

Describing a flexible approach in her classroom, Mrs. Taylor also shared that she was quick to change up an activity if it didn't seem to be working. She was also lenient with student socializing and electronic devices. She shared, "I let them talk whenever they're doing their work. If I'm not instructing them, I'll let them listen to music on an iPod. So if they're just filling out something or working on a project" (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016).

Continuing to speak about her flexibility, she then turned to difficulty she encountered with some students and how this led her to a looser approach to learning. She stated:

> My second class is hard to manage. … I have Special Ed kids, I have behavioral kids—it's a mess. So I have about half the kids want to do the work; the other half maybe, it's kind of a crapshoot. But they're all happy and I get along with them. So I don't know if there's anything to that at all, because I can't get some of them to work at all. But I can get the

> classroom under control. So they will sit down. … But some don't work at all. … I just got a teacher assistant. So I had a whole year of not having any help managing these huge behavior problems that were in my class. So my main goal was just trying to get them under control because they came in crazy. Under control and to learn the basic minimum. And they do know the basic minimum. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

Following her comment about allowing students to talk or listen to music, this statement demonstrated a flexibility extending beyond student activity, even to conceptions of success in the classroom. Specifically, for some students, she felt success was for a student to come to class and sit in his/her seat.

During my visits to Mrs. Taylor's class, I witnessed the lax approach she had described. Throughout the classes I observed students using their phones to play games, text, watch movies, and get on social media. I found the setup of large rectangular tables at which anywhere from one to seven students sat was conducive to socializing. However, this did not preclude students from shouting to each other across the room. From the loose structure of the class, then, multiple communities were formed within the classroom (e.g. groups of friends) as well as some that extended beyond the classroom (e.g. social media). Groups within the class also connected to other groups. As Mrs. Taylor played a video for the class one day, I noted a student asking, "who got the math homework? I'll trade for three dollars" (observation, April 18, 2016). These communities took place both between and during instructional times. I also witnessed the flexible approach to success already mentioned. In response to a students' question about the warm-up, Mrs. Taylor said, "I would like you to write down the question, but if you can't then just write down the answer" (observation, April 20, 2016). This "basic minimum"

approach seemed commonplace as she posted answers and encouraged students to put down something so she could give credit. In all, I found the reported flexibility present in multiple ways.

Collaborative Activities

Within the classroom, Mrs. Taylor led some activities in collaborative ways that also created opportunity for community. She described wanting to bring in hands-on activities and excitedly recounted one experiment that she felt the students really enjoyed saying:

> So the kids did this elephant toothpaste experiment—which is yeast and dish soap and hydrogen peroxide. It was very cool and dramatic. And then I brought in a higher concentration of much higher concentration of hydrogen peroxide and potassium iodine. And did once for each class and I did it upfront and boom! All over the place. And it stained the floor and the custodians hated me. I had to clean it up five times. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Besides engendering community within the classroom through engaging activities such as this one, she also posted class experiments to her Twitter account for students to access. Using technology to support collaboration for another project, she said she had created Google accounts for all her students so that they could access slides for their project, work together, and then she could check their work all through the collaborative digital space. Beyond leading activities, she mentioned making space for students to collaborate in activity ideas. She explained:

> I never discount their ideas. If they come up with an idea, how to do something, that is basically what I wanted them to get out of the project, then I'll let them do it. ... So I let them have a little bit of say in their education. A little bit. And they know I respect their thoughts and what they're doing. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

This statement suggested that while students were allowed a modicum of agency, the hierarchical classroom structure already described was maintained.

Entering the classroom at the end of the year, I was not able to see many collaborative projects. Most of the classes I visited included two activities: a basic-level, recall warm-up of three one-word or short-answer questions, and viewing a video. The one group project I did observe was a timeline. Students were grouped in what appeared to be semi-haphazard groups based on existent table groups and whom the students vied to be with. Though instructions and structuring around grouped activities may have been covered earlier in the year, no instructions on how to work together were given for this project. As a result one group finished the project—which entailed copying down scientists' information after putting them in chronological order—while completion within the remaining groups varied from some to almost none (personal observation, April 27, 2016). This outcome lent to a concept of grouping rather than collaboration. Acknowledging limited collaboration, she said this was something she aspired to do more of by bringing in more project-based learning. I also observed a sort of unsanctioned collaboration on activities. As mentioned, Mrs. Taylor fostered an environment in which students were able to socialize. This spilled over into assignments and students would sometimes copy each other's warm-up answers.

Connecting to Other Communities

A final way that I found community present in Mrs. Taylor's pedagogy was in connections to students' out-of-school communities. Student's families were particularly

mentioned. She shared about a conversation she had with her students telling them that if they didn't want Trump to be president then they needed tell people in their family who could vote to do so. Students' projects also served as a connection. Mrs. Taylor described this saying:

> I think them taking their [science projects] home, showing their parents, showing their family what they did, ... showing them that they can succeed academically, that helps them community wise as far as thinking about maybe college is the right thing. (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

This concept of working to support her students' futures connected back to her belief about her role (i.e. "inspiring them to dream"). Through this, then, her comment spoke beyond just connecting to students' home communities, it considered students' communities across time, including future schools and professions.

Though there were some connections from the classroom to exterior communities, these seemed desirable only when flowing in a single direction. When I asked Mrs. Taylor if she felt her students' communities influenced her teaching in the classroom she responded saying:

> The students communities? Well kind of, but is more disruptive than anything. So, yeah it's part of the community, but it's not a part I wish was in my community. So there might be some drama happening and you might have a little group of girls talking about cute guys or something. Or you might have some kids saying there's gonna be a fight after school. And those are all external things that they're bringing in. ... So it's overlapping into my space and I can't get their attention because that is more important to them than what I'm doing in class. ... So what community they bring in is not valuable to what's happening in the classroom (Mrs. Taylor, personal communication, April 18, 2016)

In this statement, she communicates her disproval of communities students bring into the classroom community. So despite the ways she viewed teaching and learning within in the class positively impacting students' communities, she found the inverse to be only negative.

SUMMARY

In the first part of this chapter I presented Mrs. Taylor's conceptualizations of community broadly and within a school context, her students' communities, and herself in relation to those student communities. Mrs. Taylor's idealized concept of a small town or neighborhood working together highlighted local-level concepts of geography, people, and institutions. In suggesting communities are like families, she assigned characteristics of humanization and empathy that extends across difference, including race and socioeconomic status. In contrast with this idealization, though, she recognized a socioeconomically-based racial segregation within Austin and, thus, within AISD schools (Figure 7.1). Within a school context, Mrs. Taylor identified micro-level communities as existing within the school and outside of it (e.g. AISD). Within the school, she recognized differences between the larger school community that was influenced by leadership (e.g. the principal) that set the climate of the school, and smaller groups of teachers that she felt should interact in what she called a socialist manner, everyone contributing equally. She found both positive and negative examples within these groups.

In designating students' communities, Mrs. Taylor most often spoke of more macro-level communities related to language, and other held social statuses. That is, she predominately described her students homogenously as poor, bilingual (i.e. Spanish and English), and Hispanic, also noting that many were undocumented immigrants. While she recognized their membership to the Austin community, she felt their lack of mobility and city knowledge relegated them to a geographically-limited area around their homes and school. Within this area, besides the school, she primarily identified businesses. Her recognition of many facets of the area including businesses, institutions, infrastructure, and residences—which included a secluded trailer park—demonstrated her significant knowledge of the geographic area and structure directly around the school. However, her portrayal also presented a more sterile—represented by focus on large-chain retailers—and negative picture of the students' communities—e.g. through her attention to fighting grounds and areas in disrepair. Some of these characteristics are depicted in figure 7.1. Finally, she gave concentrated attention to students' micro-community, their families. She identified these communities as important and specifically spoke about parents both in negative ways and in terms of economic oppression.

Qualities of a common identity, sense of value, layering, and, principally, negativity characterized these student communities. Mrs. Taylor recognized the significant role language played within the communities, both defining them as well as allowing access into them. Implicit in her descriptions of language, were intertwined conceptions of race, ethnicity, religion, and income level (often signified by housing) so that the statuses became somewhat grouped and flattened in a synonymous way.

Represented through such overlapping descriptions as, "African American apartments" and "trailer kids." Mrs. Taylor recognized the value some communities (but not others) held for students as they themselves felt valued within them through emotional support. She also described how membership to multiple communities overlapped, nesting smaller groups and spaces within larger ones. She found scale significant, noting smaller level communities as stronger, with families as holding chief importance to students.

Looming over all other characteristics, Mrs. Taylor described negative elements of the student communities. Recognizing oppressions upon the communities, she described the danger imposed through construction of the metro rail through students' school campus and neighborhood; the fear of deportation for undocumented immigrants; and prejudices based in stereotypes about the students. Between communities, she further identified negative features, such as students fighting and the encroachment of wealthier groups upon the school campus space. Though recognizing oppressions that students faced, Mrs. Taylor's primarily focused on negative aspects within student communities. She believed students' confined movement within a small geographic region caused them to not have a sense of belonging to larger communities, adding that Austin also contributed to this by only superficially embracing the students' culture. Pointing out destructive actions, she also felt students did not care about their school community, lacking an understanding for the value it held. In relation to students' home communities, she pointed to harm (e.g. violence and drugs). As with students not having a sense of belonging to other communities, Mrs. Taylor again mentioned that external factors (i.e. inadequate wages) played some part in this, but it was minimized, maintaining blame

largely on the parents. Lastly, as a result of other elements, she maintained that hopelessness characterized her students.

In considering these conceptualizations of her students' communities, Mrs. Taylor did not feel very connected to them. Privileging the HMS community, she considered herself, by default (i.e. forced), part of their school community. She sought to position herself in compatible ways with students by showing acceptance and tolerance and participating with some in extracurricular activities, however, she reported misalignment with their parents. Her lack of fluency in Spanish and the deficiencies she felt her students' communities possessed, presented a barrier in her potential interactions with parents. She was also socially (though not geographically) distant from the students' communities as she lived across a major highway in a more affluent area. This resulted in her not frequenting stores within the students' geographic community, and in her sending her two middle-school aged children to another school.

Believing that learning should be fun and inspiring and that students needed to feel a sense of community in the classroom, within her teaching practices Mrs. Taylor engaged with her conceptions of community in three main ways: environment, activities, and connection to external communities (Figure 7.2).

Although she described her classroom as a family and worked to create a respectful environment for this by not screaming or getting angry, students did not seem to reciprocate this. Instead, frequent student-initiated disruptions to learning characterized the space. Mrs. Taylor appeared to take this in stride as it was normalized through a lax approach with students. Communicating a notion of success that privileged behavior over

academic learning in some cases, her sanctioning of socialization and listening to music while working spilled over into instructional time. Taken together, this classroom environment created space for unsanctioned student communities to be formed.

Connected to her belief that learning should be fun, Mrs. Taylor endeavored to involve students in hands-on, project-based learning. This approach to learning ostensibly offered opportunity for collaboration among students. A lofty ideal she described aspiring to further, these collaborative activities did not characterize all classes. Rather, they seemed interspersed throughout the year and students displayed greater collaboration on unsanctioned activities than those assigned to them.

Going beyond the classroom, Mrs. Taylor conveyed a sense of the classroom connecting to external communities. She felt that what happened within the classroom could affect students' communities beyond the school, such as raising parents' expectations for their students' continued education. These connections were unidirectional, though, as she did not find any value in her students' communities for the classroom.

Taken together, though Mrs. Taylor stated that community was important for the classroom, the primary manifestations of community occurred outside of the structured learning. So while community was present within the space, it appeared unintentional, even conceived as a negative presence, much of the time.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this qualitative, multi-case study, I have examined three teachers' understandings and classroom teaching practices around community. These teachers, nominated as successful by students, administrators, and staff, offer clarity and a unique perspective for considering the expansively concept, "community," by presenting examples of how it is being understood and utilized within the classroom setting. To frame my study, I drew on theories of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Critical Human Geography and asked the following questions:

1. How do successful, urban, middle-school teachers working with students of color understand the concept of "community" in relation to their work with these students?

   a. *How do these teachers understand the communities in which their students participate and are a part?*
   b. *How do these teachers understand themselves in relation to their students' communities?*

2. How do these teachers approach and draw from their conceptions of "community" in their classroom practices?

These questions were crafted as a result of a need shown within literature for community to be explored further. Specifically, the concept of "community" has been taken up within literature by considering how it has exists problematically, in teachers' thinking, and within anti-deficit, equity-focused teaching frameworks.

EXTANT LITERATURE

In considering problems around community, scholars identified how, within education and classrooms, the term can be (1) *ill-defined* (Camicia & Franklin, 2010; Fendler, 2006), (2) *deficit-oriented and harmful* (Groulx, 2001; Hyland, 2009; Philip, Way, Garcia, Schuler-Brown, & Navarro, 2013), and (3) *alienating and exclusive* (Camicia & Franklin, 2010; Fendler, 2006). In considering community as deficit-oriented and alienating, scholars specifically identified the burden of this problematic use prominently resting on students of color.

Literature also revealed how "successful" elementary and secondary teachers have conceptualized community. These understandings included community as: (1) *existing outside of the classroom—the people, geography, and organizations surrounding the school* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008; Oliver, 1996, Ukpokodu, 2012) *and the students' "worlds"* (Milner, 2008, p. 1582; Oliver, 1996); (2) *groups defined by cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender statuses* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008); (3) *holding value and use for education* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011); and (4) *signifying a relationship—whether it be unifying and empowering through identity* (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2008) *or supporting an environment of collaboration and care* (Boutte & Hill, 2006). In all, this work focused on more fixed and limited descriptive instances and positive possibilities for the notion, often part of a larger discussion.

Community has also been presented as a valuable aspect of critical, anti-deficit pedagogical frameworks that seek to respond to an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed to student of color and other groups that have been historically underserved. Within this body of work, the ecological context has been recognized as both important and useful for the education of these underserved students. These frameworks include: culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, 2009), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010), funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), critically compassionate intellectualism (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Romero, Arce, & Cammarota, 2009), and critical hip-hop pedagogy (Akom, 2009; Hill, 2009). Two rationales for the use of community are present in this work. The first, teacher focused, is that community is useful for teachers to be able to develop a sort of cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; 2009) with regard to their students. The second, more student focused, considers community as a means for engaging, affirming, and empowering students. Taken together, these pose a strong argument for the potential of community, but do not give focus to difficulties and complexities of engaging the concept within the classroom space.

Though both positive and negative instances of community have been considered, and scholars have recognized that teachers' beliefs and practices are linked with the former affecting the latter (De Barling, 2001; Gay, 2010; Pajares, 1992), there is a scarcity of work that uses a critical theoretical foundation to specifically and deliberately consider community within K-12 teachers' understandings and practices in complex, even contradictory, ways. This study, then, expands on extant literature by presenting

three teachers' understandings and teaching practices, and the interaction between the two, through a critical, postmodern conceptual framework that allows for a complex, in-depth, and messy view of community.

FINDINGS

In considering the findings of this study, I first briefly review the placing of this study and how each teacher conceptualized community, including understandings of her students' communities and herself in relation to these, and how those conceptualizations were present in her classroom teaching practices. I then consider this collectively, across the cases.

As described, Austin is renowned worldwide for music, culture, and a growing technology sector. Overshadowing this popularity, however, is a great divide. Ranked by some as the most economically segregated city in the nation, this historically crafted divide also separates along racial lines. A result of White flight and a (allegedly intentional) failed desegregation of AISD, HMS found itself situated at the edge of two worlds—firmly anchored in one while overlooking the other. The teachers of this study, consequently, engaged with this reality (at minimum) every day they came to school.

Ms. Corazón's comprehensive, general considerations of community understood it as groupings of people based on a commonality. She understood positive communities as interdependent, existing at various scalar levels (i.e. micro, meso, and macro), and holding norms. Also recognized was the potential for negative, dysfunctional qualities or

manifestations of community. Weaved through all of this were senses of fluidity (i.e. communities being influenced along a continuum of health or functionality by various factors) and power. Similarly, student communities, predominately considered within the context of HMS, were conceptualized as a group based around a commonality; interdependent and existing across time and scale; and agentic, with students engaging in forms of resistance (as Yosso (2005) described "resistant capital") in the midst of negative communities. Again, recognizing both healthy and dysfunctional manifestations of student communities, she acknowledged fluidity and power. Focusing on students' ethnic, family, and school communities, Ms. Corazón considered herself a part of these. She classroom practices of constructing norms and facilitating collaboration and ownership among students positioned her classes (with herself included) as *high stakes communities* in which students were expected to succeed all together.

Mrs. García also conceptualized communities across scalar levels as people brought together by a commonality. She focused on school communities and how they existed in positive and negative ways, influenced by various factors (e.g. leadership). Focusing mostly on a micro, local level and a macro level of identity (e.g. nationality and language related), she described her students' communities as centered around a commonality, having potential for negative qualities, and interacting across scalar levels and time. Issues of power and inequity were also present across these understandings. Mrs. García felt that her students' communities were her own, including geographic, identity, family, school, and day-to-day (i.e. where she spent her time and money) communities. These conceptions influenced her efforts to facilitate a *family-type*

community within the classroom through an environment of playfulness and high expectations and formal and informal curriculum that connected to her and the students' communities beyond the classroom.

Mrs. Taylor envisioned an ideal community as one out of a Norman Rockwell painting: a small town or a neighborhood living and working together as a family through empathy and humanization. Considering community within the school context she noted different structuring (i.e. hierarchical or egalitarian) between the school community at large and teacher communities, and the capacity for a community's functionality to be influenced by factors related to these structures. In contrast to this idealized community she recognized students communities as geographically-located directly around their homes and HMS within the context of a segregated city. She primarily viewed student communities in an essentialized way, based on identity (e.g. poor, bilingual, and Hispanic) and having negative elements (i.e. external oppression and internal deficiency). Mrs. Taylor felt she was part of her students' school community as a result of forced interaction through being their teacher. Within the classroom she facilitated a *saving community* by working to establish herself as a caring leader and inspiring students to become interested in learning, viewing school as key to their ability to make it beyond their impoverished home communities.

Collective findings

Collectively these cases indicate some ways teachers understood community, felt a part of their students' communities, and drew on their understandings and connections in the classroom.

Findings from this study suggest that teachers consider community in contradictory ways; they simultaneously understood community as simple and complex. The teachers' general views of community aligned to varying degrees with their views of their students' communities, in some cases being closely aligned (Ms. Corazón and Mrs. García) and in one case demonstrating contrasting features (Mrs. Taylor), but in all instances and at a foundational level, the teachers viewed communities simply as people grouped by a commonality (e.g. geography, institutional connection, or social status). Communities, both generally conceived and those students were a part of, were recognized as existing across scalar levels (from individual families to all of humanity) and across time (particularly in relation to schools), applying the simple conception with a broader, encompassing view. Despite this wider view, the teachers most often spoke to students' school communities (i.e. HMS and smaller communities within) and connected this to students' family or home communities. This suggests that while the teachers held broad views of student communities, they focused more narrowly on micro-level, local communities (e.g. businesses, organizations, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and schools within or nearby HMS's attendance zone), privileging them over city, state, national, or international communities.

Adding complexity and contradiction, community also seemed to be understood as fluid with communities interacting and overlapping in both negative and positive ways. Imbedded within these interactions were understandings of power as operating within and between communities. Exclusion, alienation, appropriation of membership, and unequal benefits were just some manifestations of the asymmetrical power

relationships that were described in these instances. Adding further depth was an understanding that communities were not static, but rather dynamic and reactive with capacity to be shifted along a continuum of functionality in negative and positive ways so that they were not *only* positive or *only* negative. Factors (e.g. leadership) could strengthen a community to be functioning at an optimal level and offering its members benefits, or they could cause a community to become dysfunctional, falling apart and alienating members.

Taking this characteristic of interplay between communities into consideration, the teachers' intentional desires approaches to maintain their classrooms as positive spaces proposes this could be partially in response to a larger school context. Each teacher reported recognition of negative aspects of other school communities. Ms. Corazón shared her realization that she could only control what happened within her own classroom and reported the students' experiences of being yelled at in other classes. Mrs. Taylor also stated that emotional manipulation took place within other school spaces as teachers would cry or yell to gain a certain outcome from students. She indicated a negativity within the larger school context existed prior to the (then) principal coming to HMS that year. Then, within the larger school community, Mrs. García shared concern about exclusion of some student groups. In working to construct a positive classroom community, then, these efforts could be understood as forming a response to other school communities perceived to be more negative that the class community was nested within or along side of.

In addition to suggesting class communities could form a response to other school communities, at a larger scale, these might also be understood as a response to communities outside of the school. All of the teachers recognized a social inequity that their students' communities experienced. Pointing to real estate, businesses, school resources, jobs, and more, the teachers described economic disparity across Austin communities (i.e. neighborhoods) that resulted in a stark segregation that ran along racial and ethnic lines. Viewing this asymmetrical distribution of wealth as a structural inequality, all of the teachers actively worked to disrupt it in some way within the classroom. Ms. Corazón called on students to support each other, saying they were all in the boat together. She also worked to instill confidence in students, discounting any failures as anomalies and at the same time giving them "secret" strategies that would help them "beat" the test. Mrs. García engaged students in critical conversations, encouraging them to travel and dream, and telling them that they should own the restaurant, not be a dish washer. Viewing hard work in school as key dismantling structural inequality, Mrs. Taylor sought to inspire students to love learning and consider their future possibilities, particularly in regards to continuing their education and getting a well-paying job.

Despite shared recognition of social inequity, the teachers held a mix of wealth- (Yosso, 2005) and deficit- based views around their students' communities. Acknowledging some assets of student communities, Mrs. García demonstrated a high regard for parental knowledge and participation within her classroom community, and Ms. Corazón, likewise, depended upon parental participation. Parents were viewed more as an inhibitory factor for Mrs. Taylor, though, as she perceived that parents held low

expectations for their student's educational paths and maintained a negative (including absence and violence) home environment. Similarly, Ms. Corazón's and Mrs. García's manner of speaking (e.g. terminology or language used), use of student communities' interests and knowledge within learning (e.g. sports, music, or parents' budget), and participation with them in their spaces outside of the classroom (e.g. eating lunch with students and attending sporting matches and music recitals) demonstrated a positive view of student communities. Mrs. Taylor also drew on her student's cultural knowledge in some instances, but reported that she felt any student communities being brought into the classroom (e.g. cliques) were a disruption. These differential views indicate that conflict within a teacher's understandings of student communities may exist.

A sense of belonging to student communities, seemingly affected by several factors, varied significantly across teachers. Reporting the most connections, Mrs. García felt her students' communities were her own. She conveyed the importance of identity (including language as an important aspect of this), residence, day-to-day activities, longevity at HMS, and deliberate participation with students and their parents outside of the classroom for supporting this. In only her first year, Ms. Corazón said she already felt significantly connected with her students despite living across town. Similarly, she described how identity (again including language as critical) and deliberate, extracurricular participation was important for this. Though Mrs. Taylor lived the closest to HMS (but outside of the attendance zone, across a highway that served as a city segregation border) and knew of her students' micro-level geographic community (i.e. the area surrounding their home and school) and critiqued the geographically-based

inequality she saw, however, she did not spend her time or money within this space and did not report a sense of belonging to it. Rather she described herself as belonging only to students' forced school communities (e.g. the classroom). She also described some extracurricular participation with her students, however, this engagement was primarily around science-related events (e.g. the science fair she organized), privileging her own interest somewhat, rather than engaging with students in a wider range of events.

In addition to these direct connections to student communities felt by teachers, they also implicitly suggested connection between themselves and their students within the context of a larger community. Each teacher believed their students' future communities would overlap with their own. Ms. Corazón told students that when she became a viejita, she would need their professional medical expertise. Likewise, after remarking that students needed to be restaurant owners, Mrs. García playfully added that she wanted to come eat in those restaurants for free. Taking a slightly different view, Mrs. Taylor considered the implications upon her community if students could not earn a living wage as adults saying that this was the foundation for crime. Investing in their students' (i.e. class community), the teachers conveyed a mutual benefit.

Within the classroom, the various manifestations of communities, suggests that there is not one-size-fits-all way that community can and should be facilitated. While Ms. Corazón sought to facilitate and organize more permanent sub communities within the larger class community, Mrs. García simply focused on the class as a whole. Mrs. Taylor also primarily focused on the class as a whole, but allowed temporary, more spontaneously-formed sub communities. Additionally, unsanctioned sub communities

arose within this environment, disrupting or inhibiting learning. This returns to the teachers' shared notions of shifting and dynamic notions of community that exist as layered and interacting.

Looking across community understandings, sense of belonging, and classrooms, these findings further suggest that the teachers' views of their students' communities and membership to these communities impacted their classroom environments and goals in tangible ways. While Mrs. García and Ms. Corazón drew on their knowledge of and connection to their students' communities (e.g. home or sports teams) to support an engaged, respectful classroom (i.e. classroom management), Mrs. Taylor's misalignment with the home communities limited her options for addressing disruptions and fostering participation. Additionally, deficient views of student communities (e.g. neighborhoods, families, and friends) resulted in minimal goals for academic achievement and inhibited her from being able to draw on student communities within the classroom to support achievement. In contrast, Ms. Corazón described how her involvement with extracurricular groups further increased her expectations of students, causing her to believe they should be challenged to reach greater academic accomplishments. She was also able to bring student communities' knowledge, culture, and interests into the classroom to scaffold concepts. Mrs. García also held students to a high level of learning, consistently reminding students that the class counted as high school credit, and found her students' communities important for learning, making such suggestions as using their refrigerator or grocery store as practice for vocabulary. This proposes a significant

positive link between shared community membership and a class community's high level of functionality.

RESPONDING TO EXTANT LITERATURE

While some scholars have problematized community, others have drawn on it in foundational ways, speaking implicitly to the significance of community for supporting equity-focused, anti-deficit pedagogies. This study intervenes by suggesting that rather than thinking of community in "either-or" terms, it should be approached as "both-and." That is, in contrast to thinking about the notion in static and binary ways, community must be recognized as existing as problematic *and* foundational for teaching practices, with a propensity to shift across time and interact with other spaces.

Furthermore, these findings propose additional ways that community can exist problematically, while also explicitly highlighting pedagogical importance. In addition to being ill-defined, deficit-oriented, and alienating or exclusive, findings indicate that community may exist in superficial or forced ways and that unequal distribution of status and benefits may exist within and between communities. In contrast to this, this study also explicitly proposes a crucial capacity for community to positively impact educational outcomes through constructive student engagement and high academic achievement. However, rather than simply *drawing on* student communities to support these outcomes, this study suggests the importance of *being of* students' communities, experientially knowing them. This ties teachers' ideological, ontological, and epistemological states in a way that aligns with how Ladson Billings (1995b, 2009) described the teachers in her

study and pushes frameworks that simply call for teachers to draw on students' communities as a tool for teaching.

Finally, while the understandings of community held by the teachers in this study align with the various understandings other scholars have found, this study expands on these works by adding additional conceptions and by bringing all of these together to form a more complex, in-depth picture of teachers' thinking about the concept.

INFORMING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CRP AND CHG

This study has demonstrated not only the usefulness of CHG within the field of education, but also how the pairing of CRP and CHG serves to expand and build on perspectives, rather than detract from them (Soja, 2010). Speaking to both frameworks, community, as conceptualized by the teachers in this study, encapsulated a combination of both social (prominently considered within CRP) and spatial (prominently considered within CHG) manifestations and tied to expanded critiques of inequality and injustice. With regard to CRP, this connects to a sociopolitical consciousness, offering a broadened understanding that includes recognition of the spaces within and around a school and how these function to perpetuate inequity and a status quo. In relation to CHG, the classroom, offers a social space that draws from multiple geographic spaces, with the potential to unite them and create a new space in which to work toward equity and justice.

Beyond this, the findings of this study expanded CRP in some key ways. While CRP primarily draws on a notion of the students' community in a more singular and

static way, this study demonstrates a more expansive and complex existence of community. Moreover, many student communities were identified and described and while many overlapped, it is important to consider that some did not and that by speaking of one student community, some communities may be overlooked. This is somewhat aligned with the need Paris (2012) expressed for CRP to go further in considering the multiple aspects (e.g. languages) of student communities. The teachers' more general conceptions of community and then those applied (i.e. student communities) also reveal that teachers may hold multiple understandings around community and that these may correspond or diverge. This offers a more complex way to think about teachers' understanding and how this may impact their expectations for academic achievement or for fostering sociopolitical consciousness among students. Similarly, in thinking about this study, teacher connection and membership to student communities also adds depth to the notion of cultural competence. Finally, the shifting nature of community can be used to inform a CRP framework, suggesting that a culturally relevant approach to teaching must be flexible and able to shift, change, and interact along with students and their communities. While Ladson-Billings does speak to each teacher in her study having different approaches, less was initially said about how each teacher's approaches differ within and across school years. However, in more recent work (Ladson-Billings, 2014) this important understanding of evolution, specifically recognizing culture as changing, is present and aligns with the findings from this study.

The theoretical framework of CHG can also be considered in more expansive ways through the findings of this study. Aligning with CHG, center and periphery

communities were evident within the teachers' presentations of community. However, beyond this simple binary, communities, as described by the teachers, held potential for inequity to exist not only between communities, but also within communities. For instance, marginalized communities could further marginalize members. In this same vein, community also held potential for instances of positive and negative qualities to be present simultaneously or across time. This also expands understandings of spaces and how they become dissolved and (re)produced. Finally, this study brought attention to the forward existence of spaces more explicitly as the teachers described how their students were already members of future communities and how these future communities would or could interact. Though CHG recognizes spaces as existing across time, often the focus in on how present spaces are (re)productions of past spaces. This attention to future spaces, then connects to this and offers a more vibrant picture and application of space.

LIMITATIONS

In considering these findings, I recognize their limitations. First, transferability and generalizability is limited due to the nature of this research as a case study. Self-reporting (e.g. interviewing) is known to offer biased and flawed responses. This study, including only three teachers as participants, is also limited in size and scale (Noyes, 2013). That is, by only examining teachers, this work is limited to the consideration of community within one scalar level despite the fact that teachers and teaching exists within the context of multiple, overlapping levels (e.g. school or district).

Additionally, the data collected and findings developed from the data are limited by personal bias. Merriam described this issue of representation: "Every researcher struggles with representing the 'truth' of their findings as well as allowing the 'voices' of their participants to be heard" (Merriam, 2001, p. 414). While I worked to fully and fairly portray the participant's understandings, I recognize my interpretation of all conversations, observations, and other materials through epistemological and ideological lenses.

IMPLICATIONS

This study holds implications for teaching and teacher education. The broader knowledge and experiences that each teacher in this study held (e.g. understanding of social inequities or identity related lived experiences) affected their views of their students which in turn affected their teaching practices (e.g. expectations). It is imperative, then that teacher education and development programs center teacher epistemology and ideology, facilitating anti-deficit and anti-racist understandings and framings. As the teachers in this study engaged with student communities, their epistemological and ideological lenses affected their interactions. Because of this, engaging teachers in thinking about their perceptions and beliefs may serve well as a first step, creating a foundation for more positive, anti-deficit interactions with student communities.

While teacher education programs have already looked to materials, discussions, and courses that work to support the development of anti-deficit and anti-racist educators, this study found that the teachers' actions directly affected their knowledge and views of their students' communities. Pre- and in-service teachers, then, may also benefit from active engagement with students and their communities beyond the classroom. However, the findings from this study also suggest that while geography, such as encountered in a "community walk," is significant, on it's own it is not enough to support a full engagement with or wealth perspectives of students' communities. Rather, more nuanced participation with spaces and activities that correspond with students' interests, investments, skills, and resources (e.g. a music recital) rather than the teacher's (e.g. an after-school club created by the teacher in the teacher's subject area) may further support teachers' anti-deficit ideology and insider status with student communities. In addition to affecting a teacher's views of students and their communities, the findings suggest that these intentional actions to engage, and consequent membership, with student communities may also support a rigorous, but cohesive and cordial classroom space.

Additionally, in line with the quote by Zygmunt-Fillwalk, Malaby, and Clausen (2010) regarding "guerilla teaching," that introduced this project, these findings suggest that community is and must be an integral part of teaching and that teachers. In the absence of intentional attention to student communities, it is almost certain that community will still exist. However, communities may exist in negative, disruptive, or dysfunctional ways. Other aspects of the communities, such as various facets of identity, should also be considered. Language was a key aspect of identity that should not

understated. All of the teachers in this study either found that shared language supported participation and membership with student communities or that lack of language (i.e. Spanish) hindered participation and membership.

In sum, this study suggests that a teacher's epistemological and ideological lenses strongly affect (i.e. support or hinder) participation and membership with student communities and that this status then affects the classroom environment and teaching practices in corresponding ways. Teacher candidates, then, should be supported in anti-deficit understandings and equipped with skills of community engagement so that wherever they take up a position, they will be able to participate with and gain membership status with their students' communities. Similarly, in-service teachers can apply this to their current positions.

Beyond teacher education and development, there are two main implications to be considered for school leadership. In response to the complex and dynamic conceptualizations presented, specific attention and care should be given to use of the concept or term, "community," so that it is not approached in taken for granted, forced, appropriated, or superficial ways. Secondly, as community was found to shift in both positive and negative ways, intentional focus should also be given to facilitate and maintain a healthy, functioning school community.

All of this calls for educators, scholars, and researchers to think about community in a more nuanced, deep, and intentional way. As described, community exists within schools and classrooms whether intended or not, so it must be attended to. However, care should be taken to not flatten or essentialized community. Rather a fuller conception of

community should include shifting and dynamic qualities that are the result of layered communities that exist not only across spaces, but also across time (i.e. past and future) and on a continuum that creates potential for both negative and positive characteristics in any given manifestation.

FUTURE RESEARCH

More work that focuses explicitly on the notion of "community" within schooling is needed. One thread extending across the teachers' accounts was the contention that school leadership plays a critical role in determining the health and level of functionality of a school community. Within this study, each of the teachers positioned her classroom as a space within but separate from the larger school context, which was described in negative ways (e.g. other teachers yelling at students, administration not listening to teachers, disunity among teachers, and so forth). With this in mind, the class communities, then, are positioned in opposition to school at large. Future research should consider this dynamic between school and classroom and specifically seek to better understand what possibilities are opened up for class communities when they do not have to be in conflict with the larger school community. In this vein, work should be done to better understand the role of school leaders in shaping a positive, high-functioning school community and how this leadership, in turn, affects class communities. This research would examine both the role of leadership and the interaction of strong, healthy communities across levels within a school.

In another related direction, more work also needs to be done around students. As students' voices have been largely unheard, it is imperative that we gain more understanding about how they perceive their teachers' understandings of their communities, if they feel their teachers are a part of their communities, and what they feel influences a teacher's status with their communities. Secondly, considering the classroom space, students' perceptions of their teachers should be considered in relation to how this impacts student motivation and sense of community in the classroom. Similarly, it is important to ask students about what classes they feel a sense of ownership and community in and what factors affect this, both positively and negatively. More nuanced understandings of leadership at the larger school level and students experiences within the classroom would greatly strengthen and enhance conversations around community as a part of PK-12 education.

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Figure 3.1. Non-Hispanic White Population Concentrations.

This figure illustrates population concentrations across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

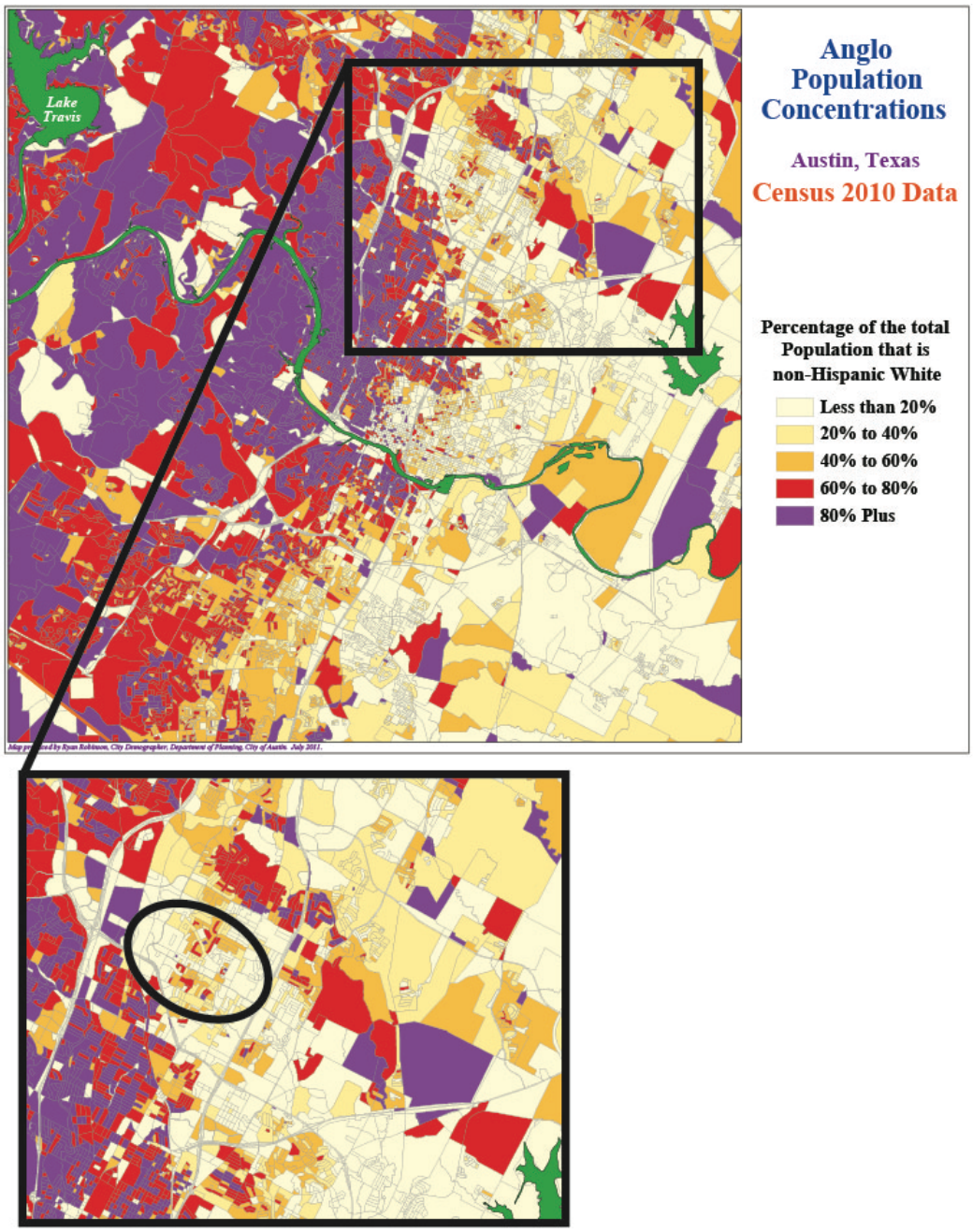

Figure 3.2. African American Population Concentrations.

This figure illustrates population concentrations across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

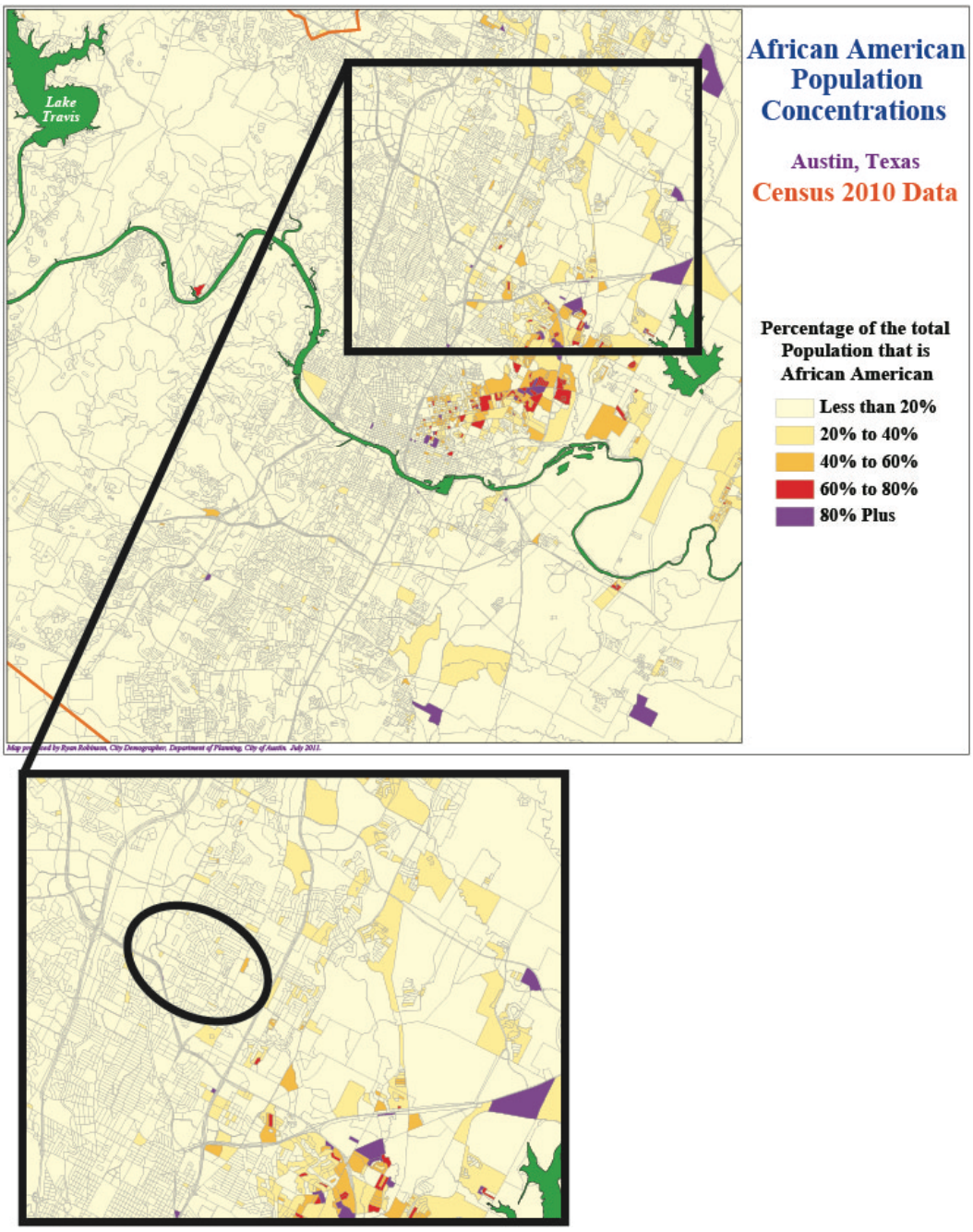

Figure 3.3. African American Absolute Number of Individuals.

This figure illustrates the absolute number of individuals across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

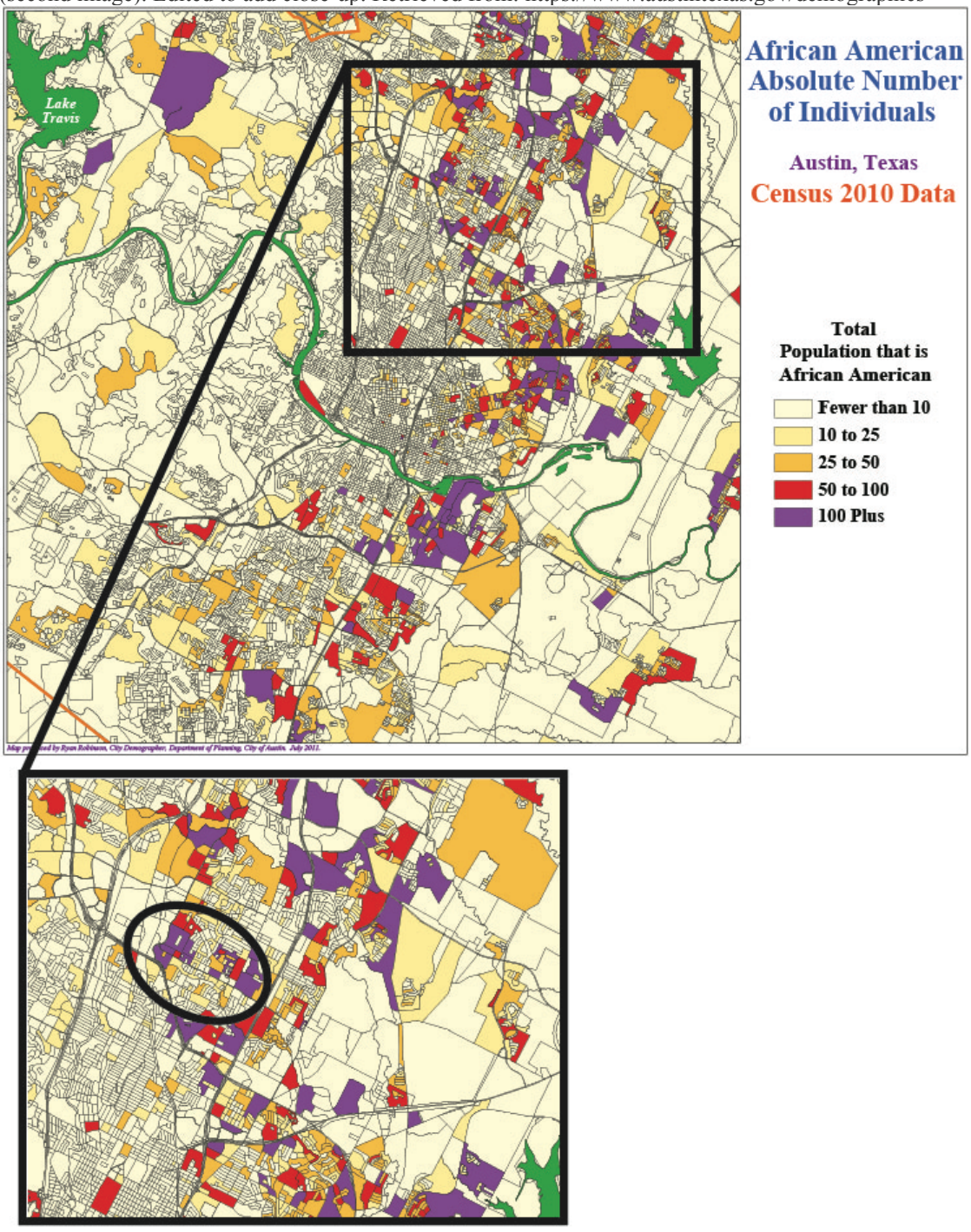

Figure 3.4. Latino—Hispanic Population Concentrations.

This figure illustrates population concentrations across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

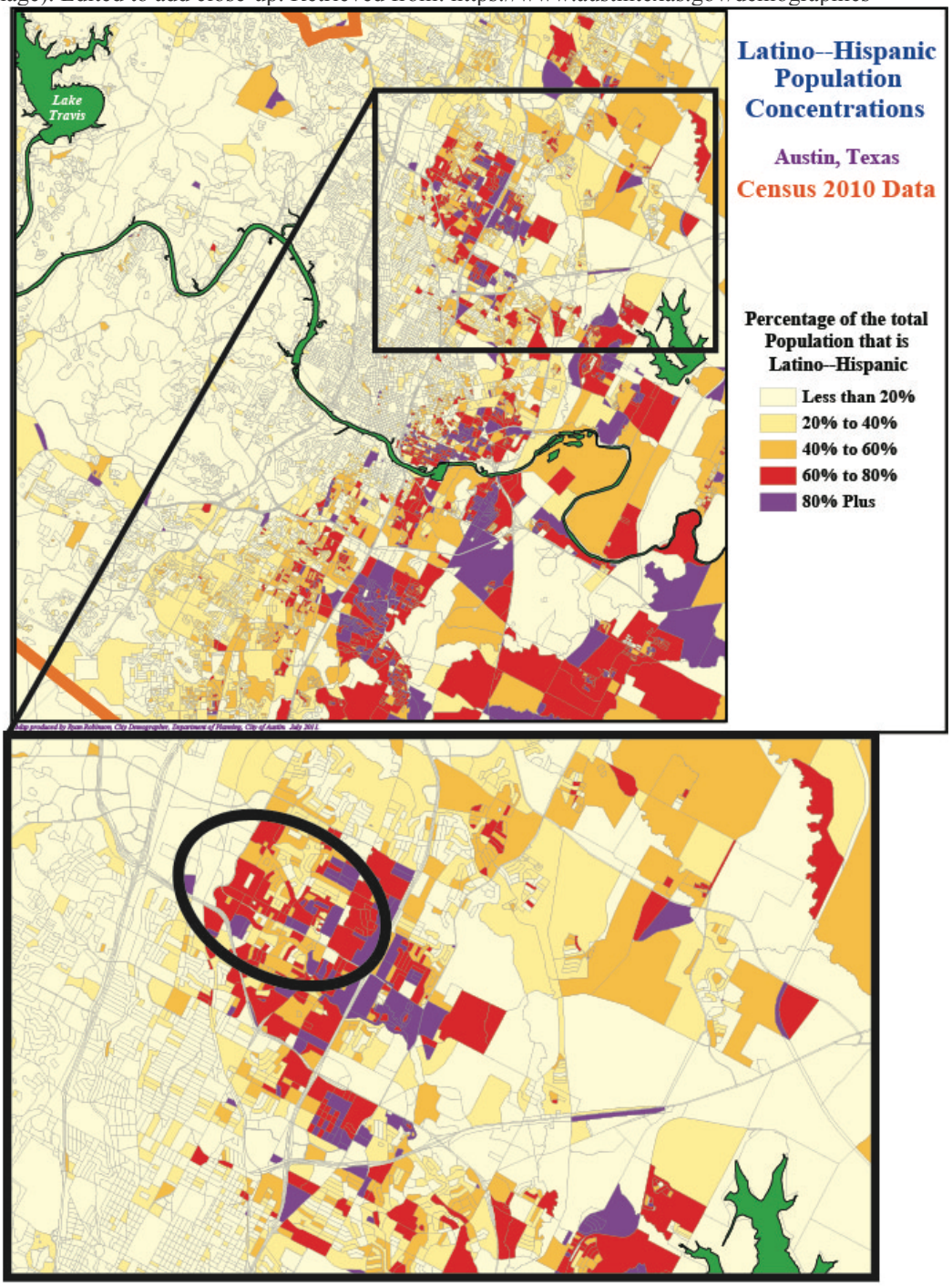

Figure 3.5. Asian Population Concentrations.

This figure illustrates population concentrations across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

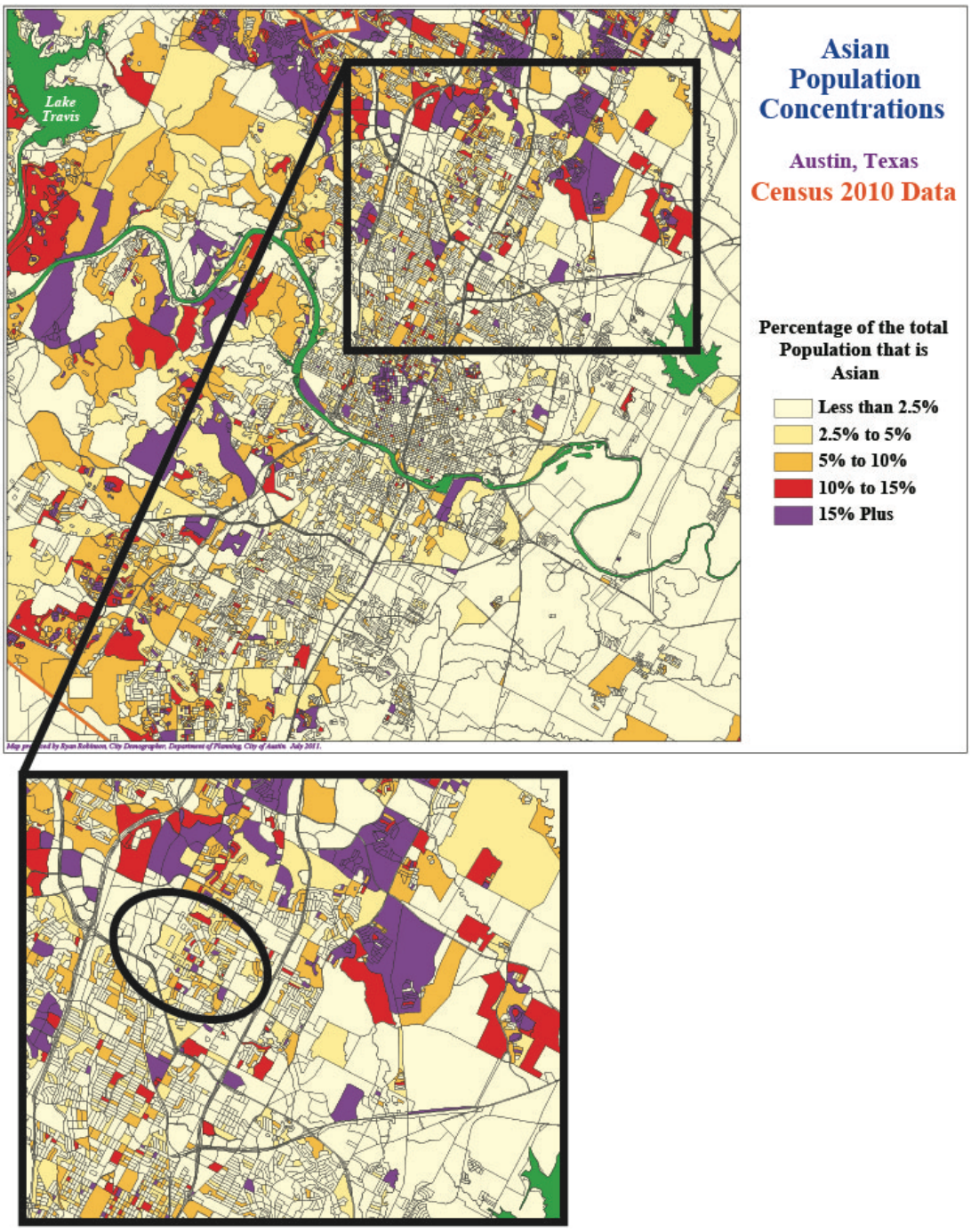

Figure 3.6. Low Income Population Concentrations.

This figure illustrates population concentrations across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

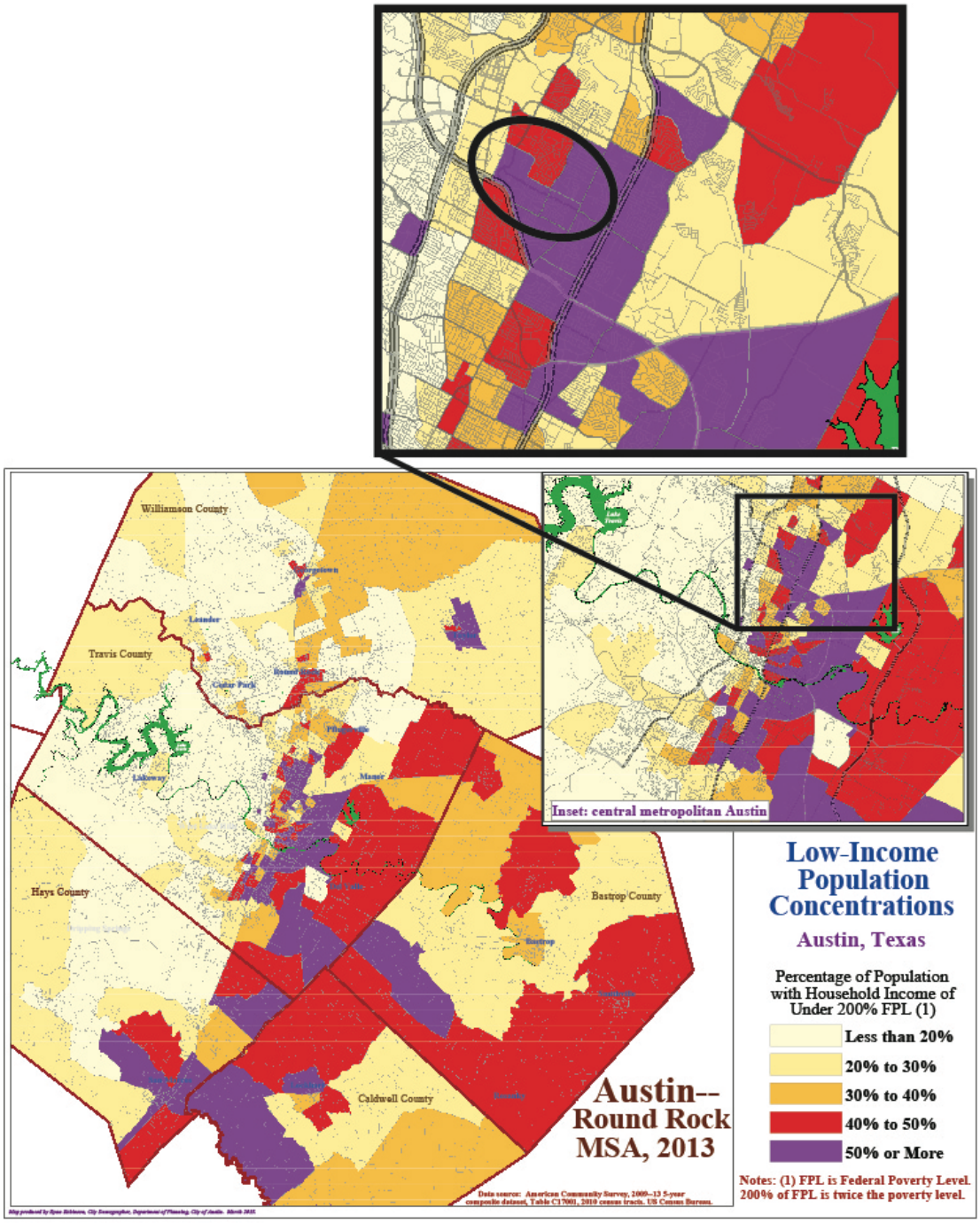

Figure 3.7. Foreign-Born Population Concentrations.

This figure illustrates population concentrations across the city (first image) and surrounding HMS (second image). Edited to add close-up. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/demographics

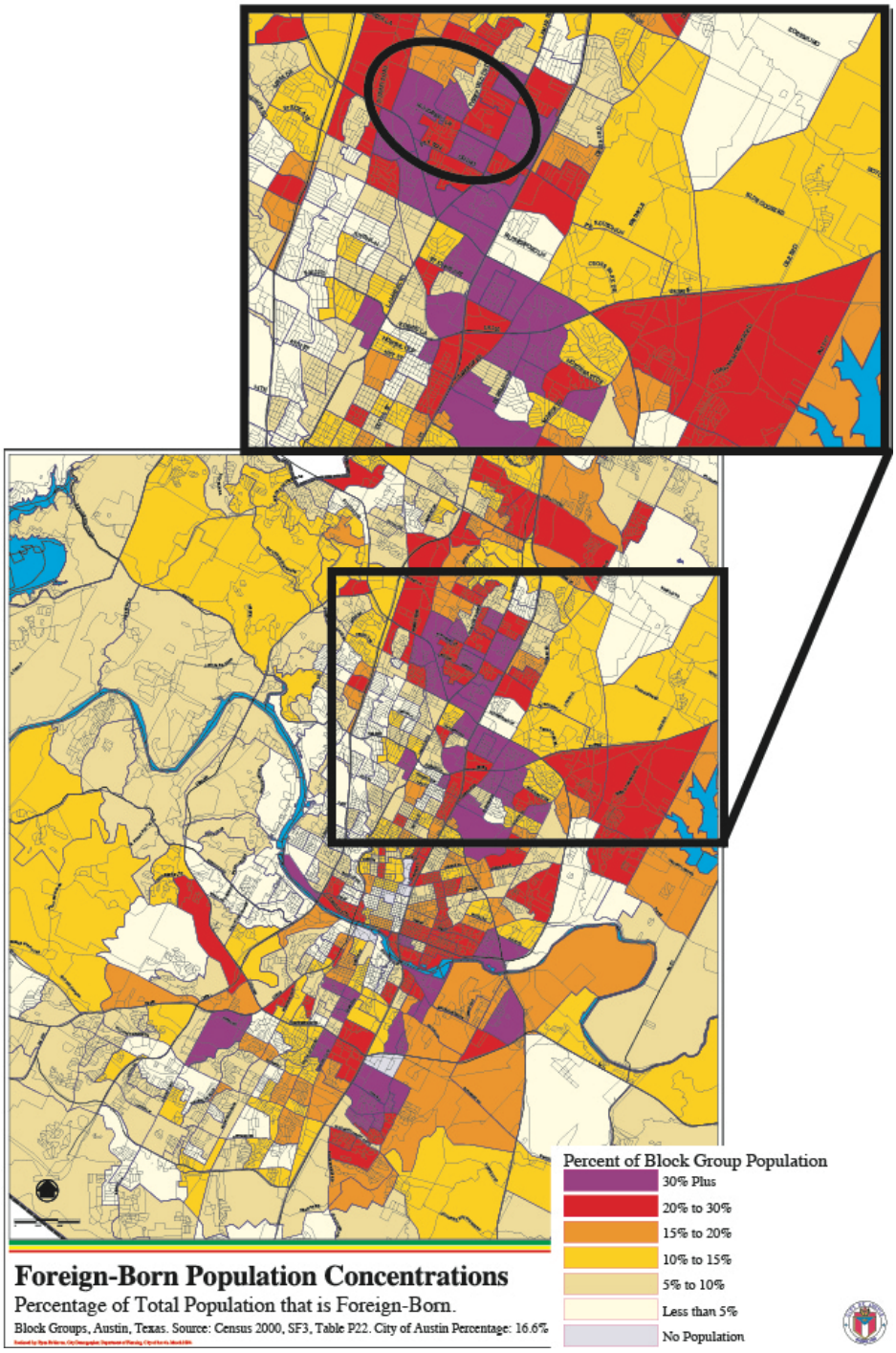

Figure 4.1: Districts, Attendance Zone, and Teacher Residences

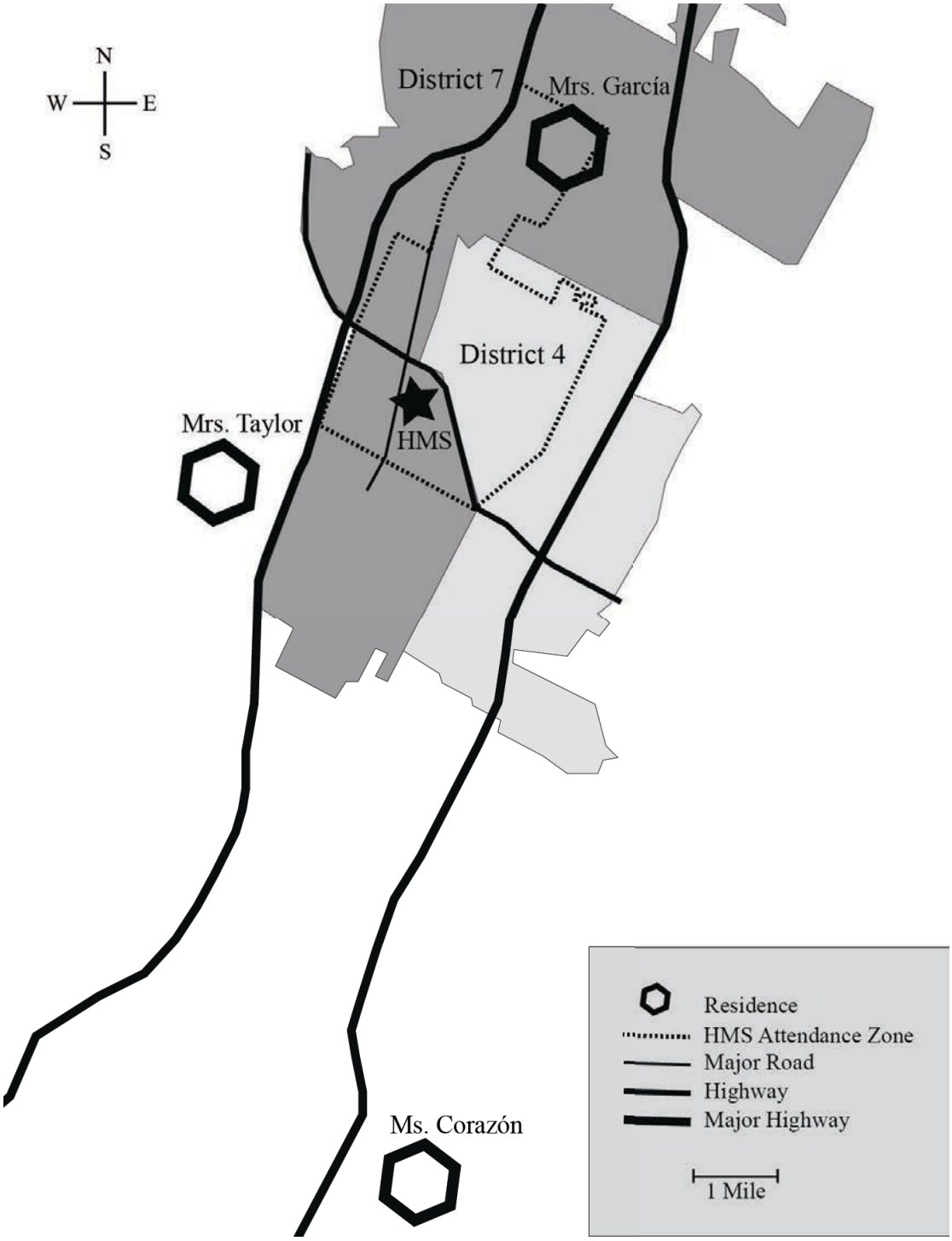

Figure 5.1: Functionality level of a community and factors affecting

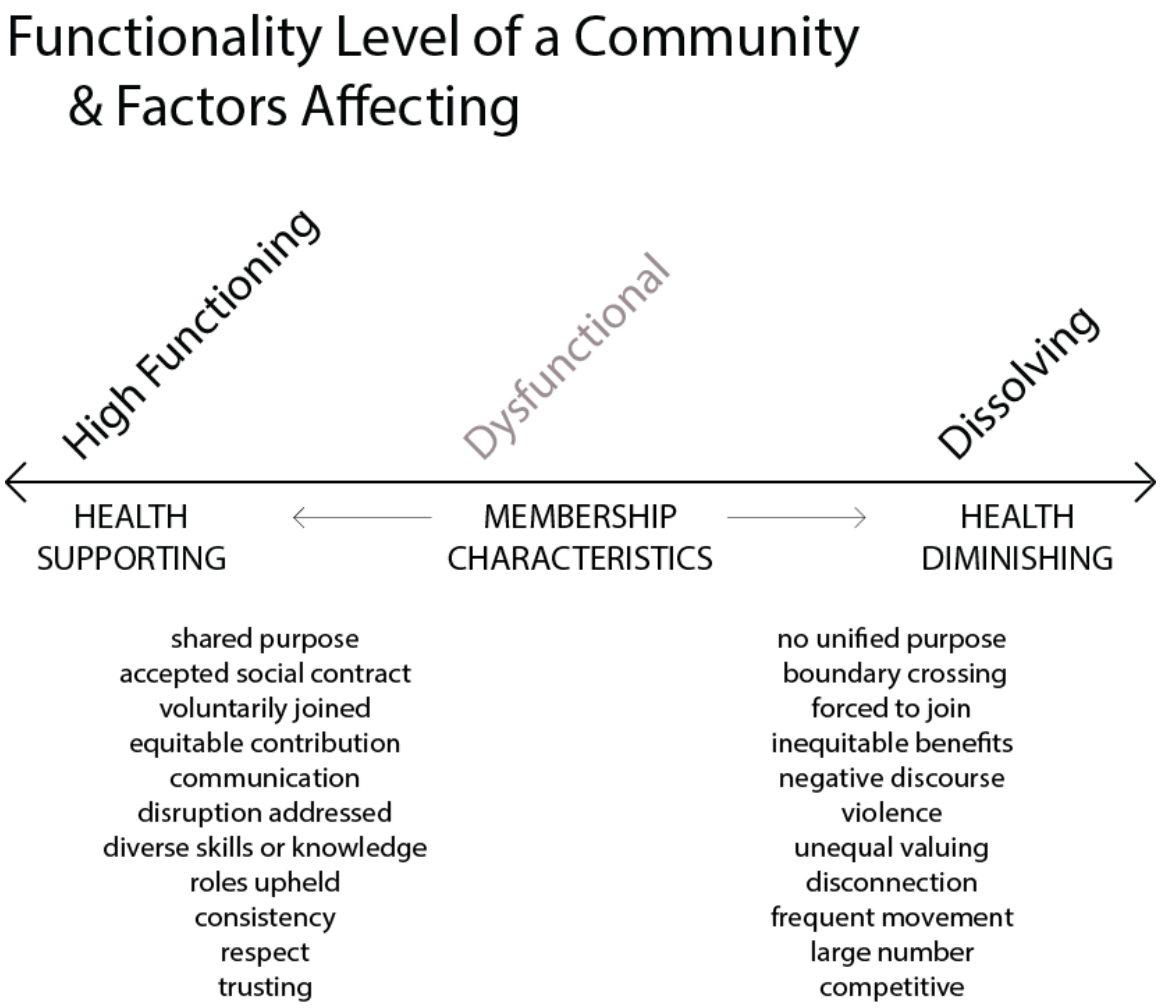

Figure 5.2: Community in the classroom

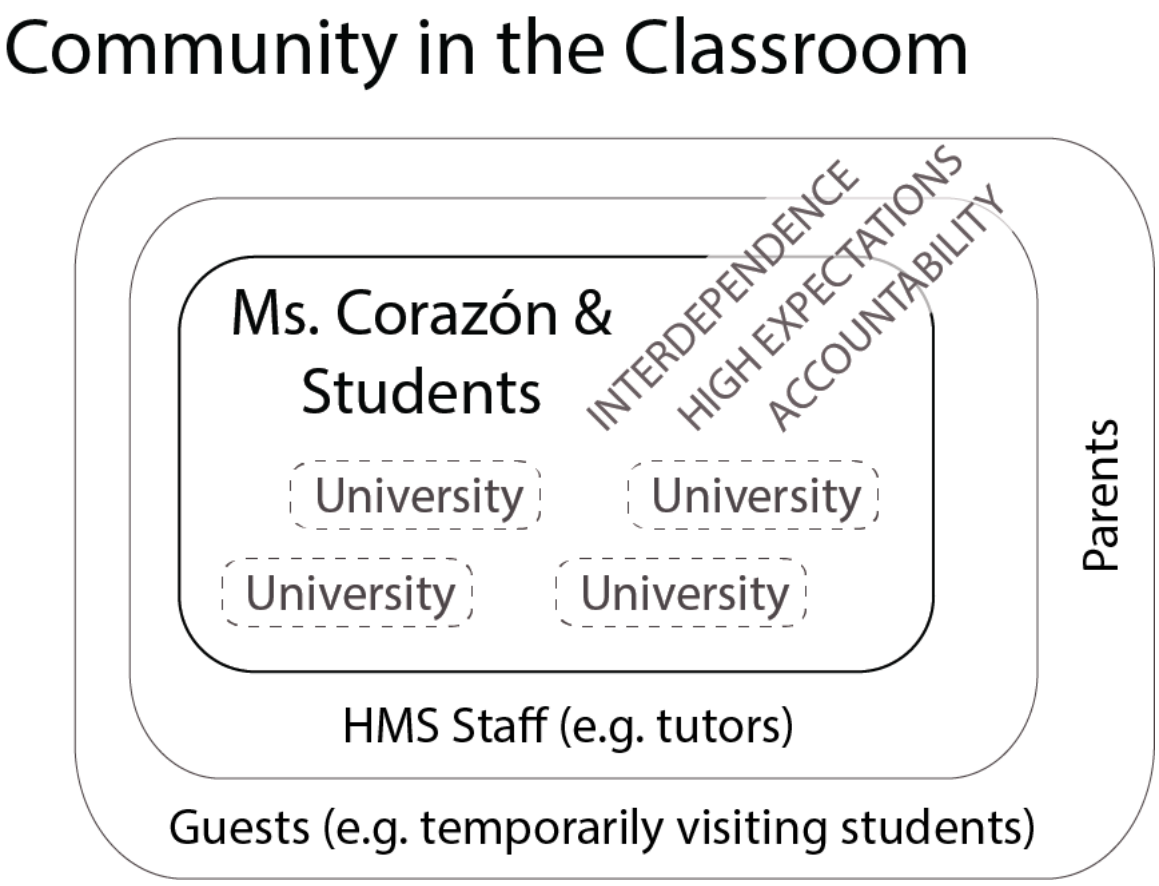

Figure 6.1: Community Characteristics Within School Context

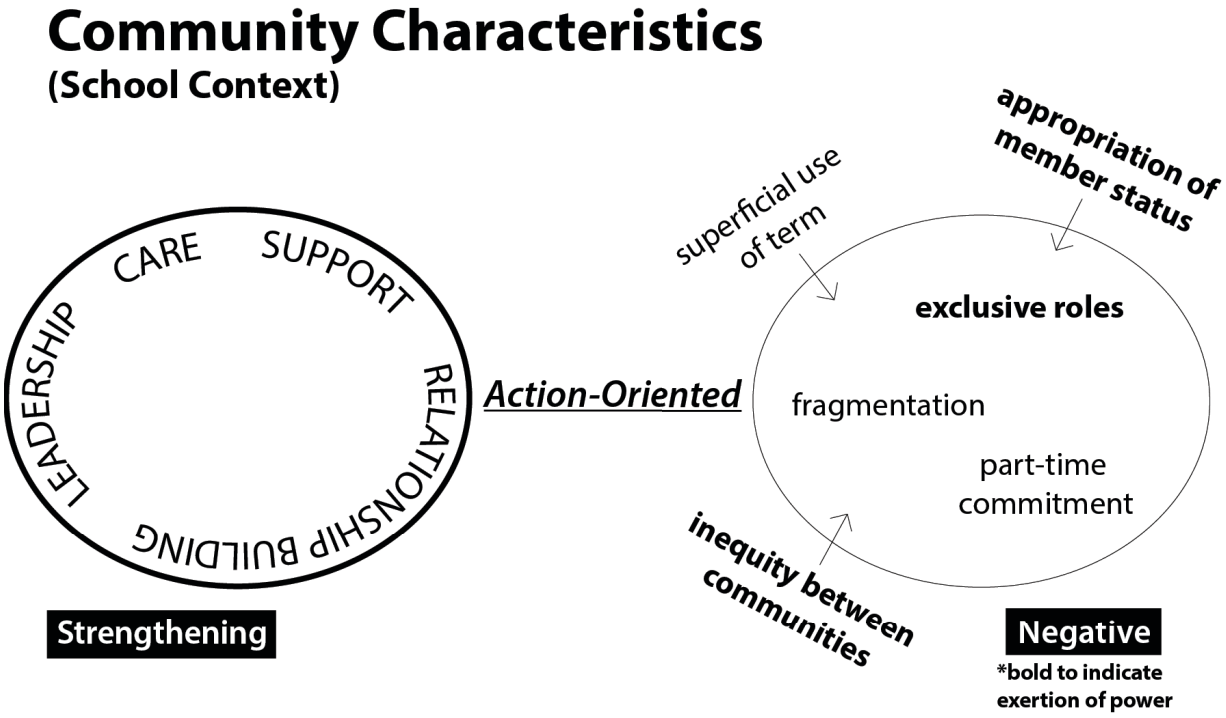

Figure 6.1: Community in the Classroom

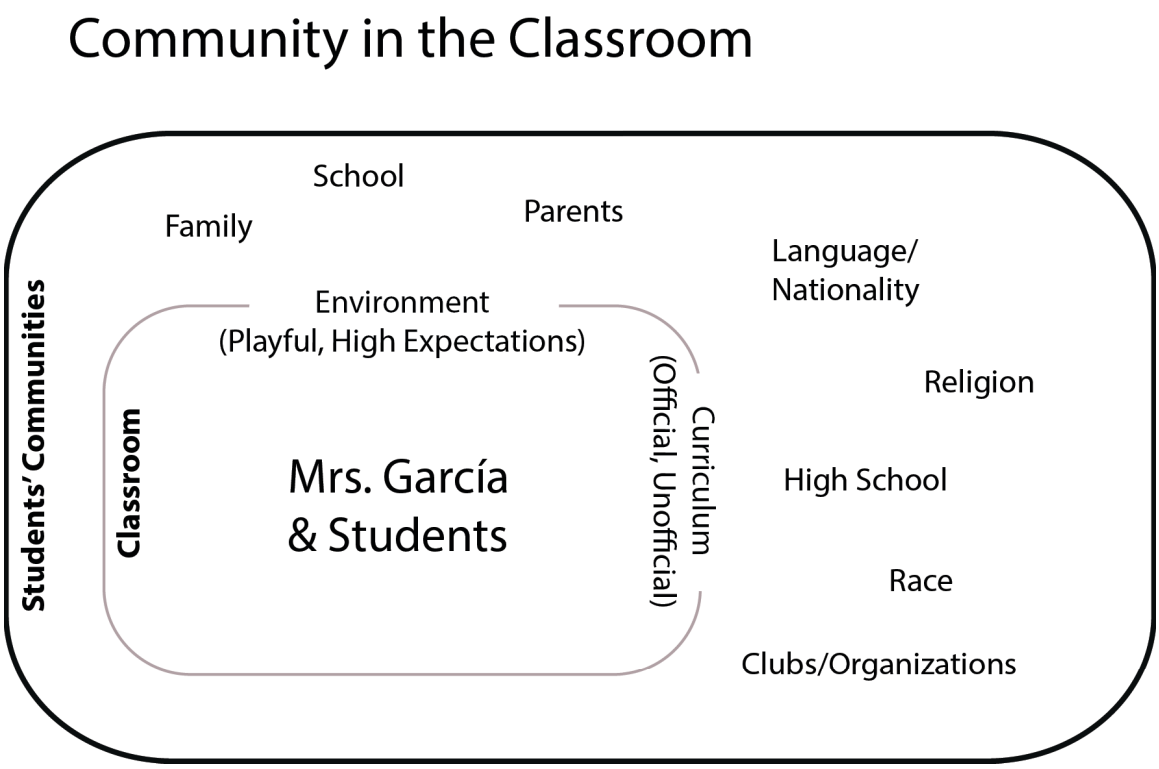

Figure 7.1: Spatial segregation and community descriptions in Austin

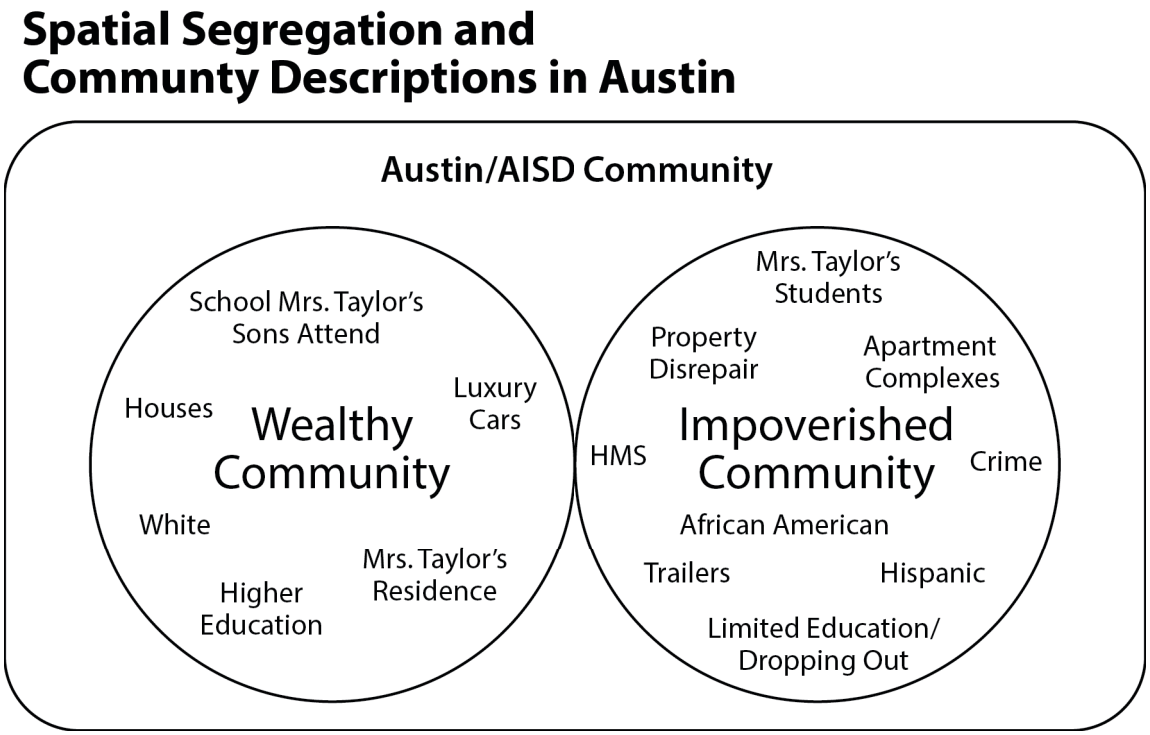

Figure 7.2: Community in the classroom

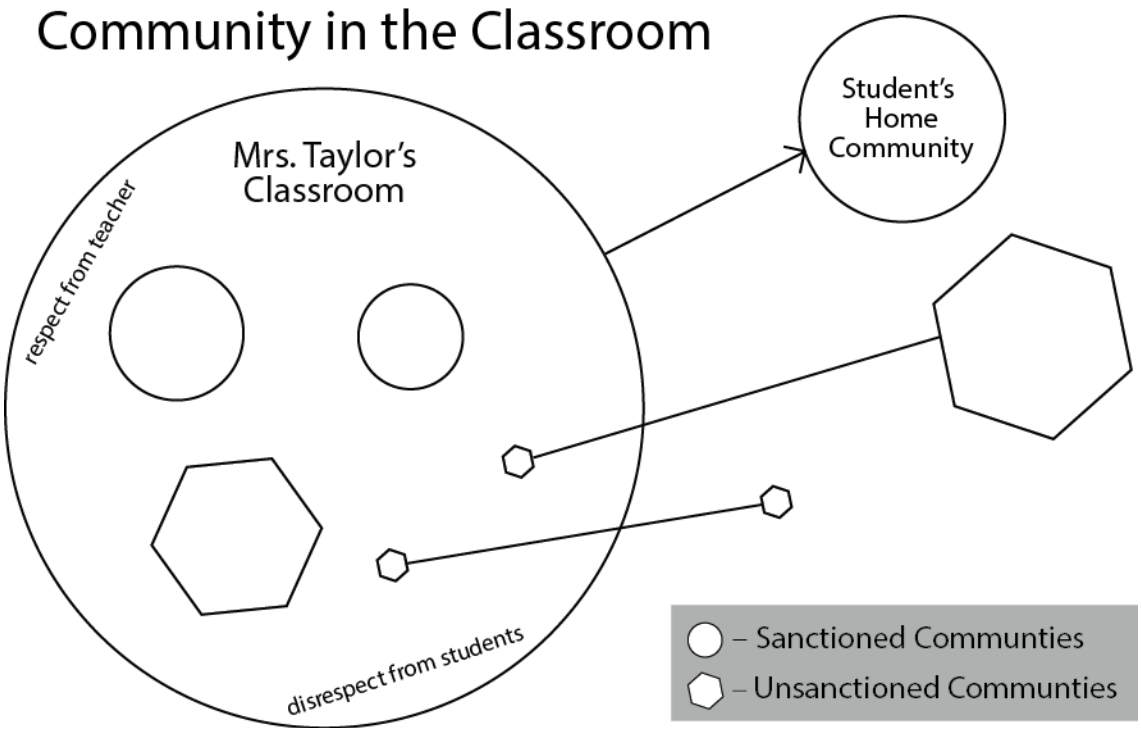

Image 5.1: Beginning of the year collage

Image 5.2: Spaghetti and marshmallow activity

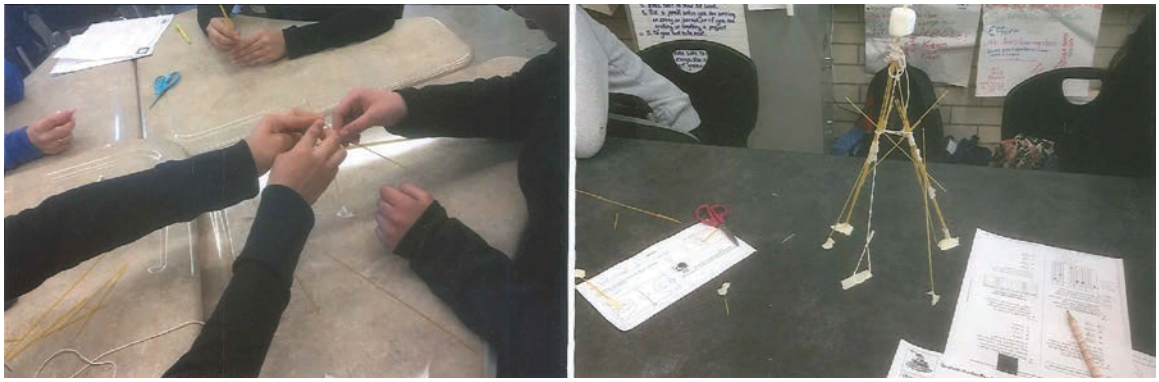

Image 5.3: Area of a 3D object activity

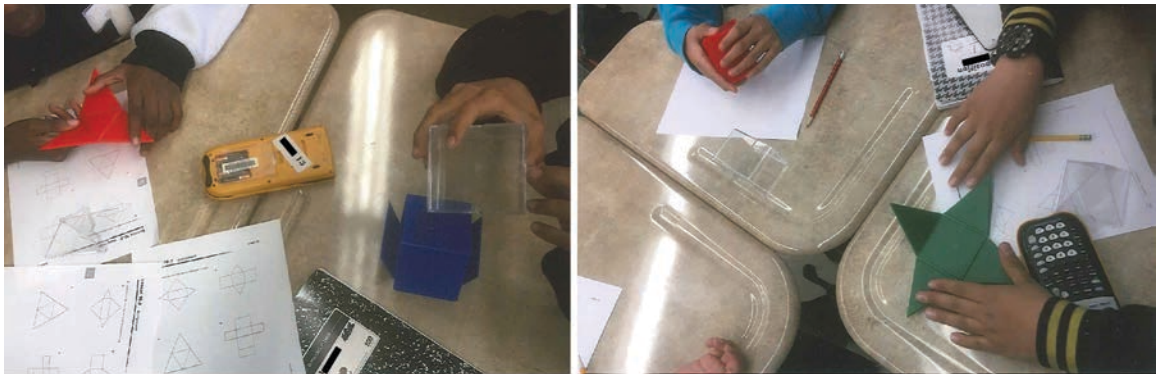

Image 5.4: Soccer

Image 5.5: Circuit activity

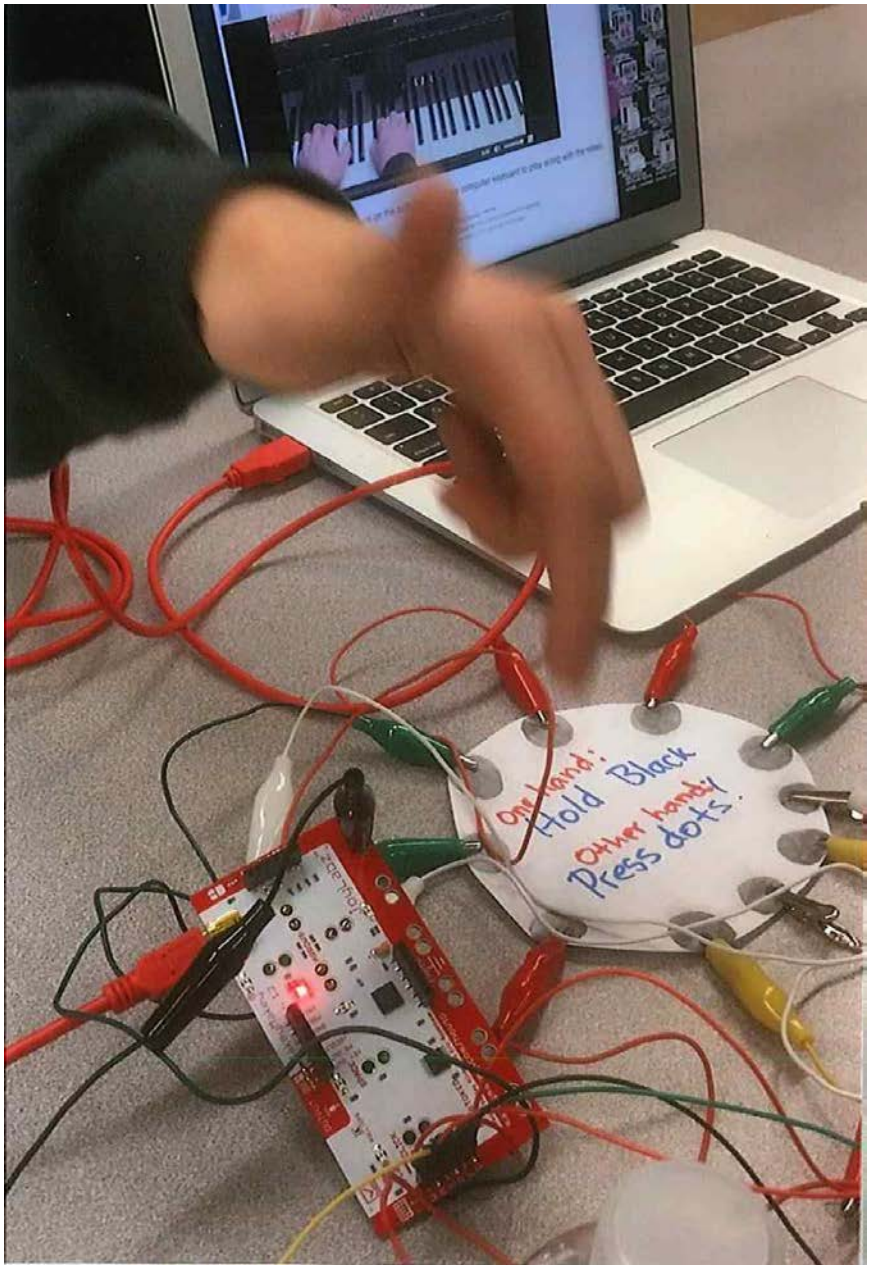

Image 5.6: College week posters

Image 6.1: Mrs. García's portable classroom and plants

Image 6.2: HMS portables and sidewalks

Image 6.3: HMS entrance garden and “Mother Tree”

Image 6.4: HMS track

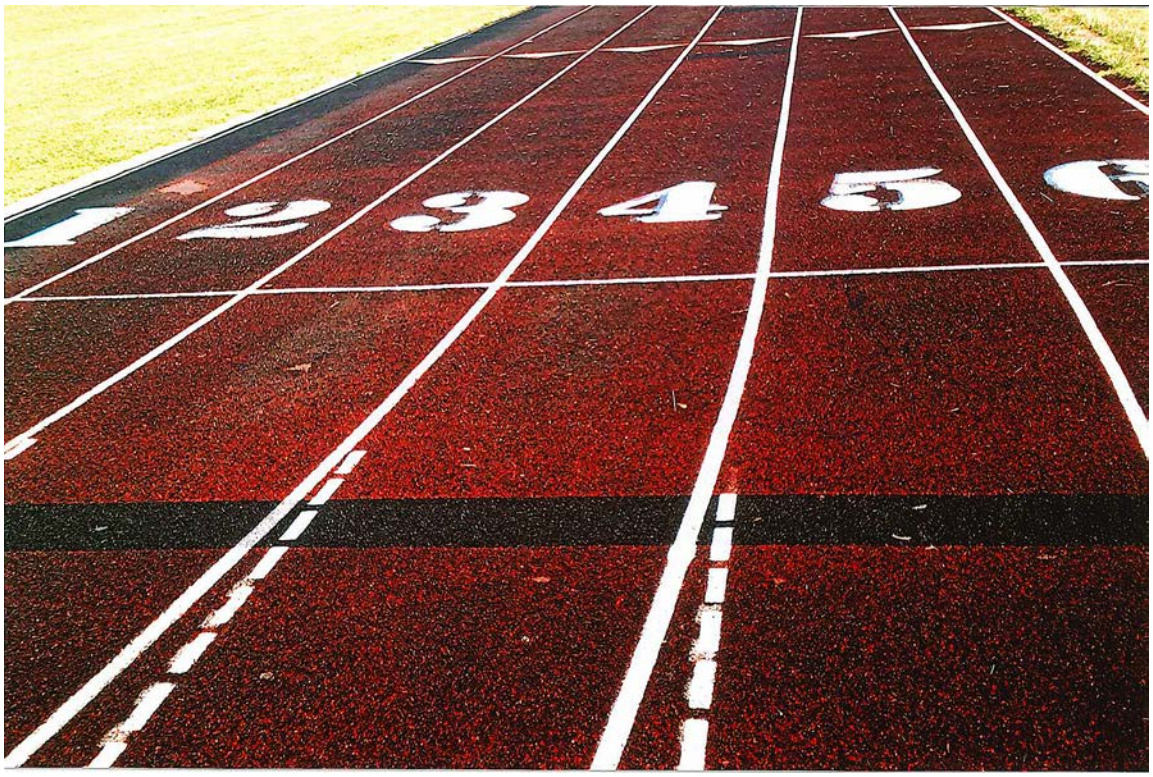

Image 6.5: MetroRail track at edge of HMS campus

Image 6.6: Woman selling food

Image 6.7: Grocery store

Image 6.8: Shopping center

Image 6.9: Mrs. García's house

Image 7.1: Bus lane

Image 7.2: Capital MetroRail crossing

Image 7.3: Ripped bulletin board

Image 7.4: Local restaurant

Image 7.5: Dairy Queen within walking distance from HMS

Image 7.6: Tesla service center

Image 7.7: Panaderia and other businesses

Image 7.8: Highway

Image 7.9: Apartment complex

Image 7.10: Trailer